



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

For Immediate Release:
January 24, 2007

For More Information Contact:
Dave Druker
Randy Nehrt

Jesse White Proposes Legislation To Improve Teen Driver Laws

Aims to triple permit phase; suggests voluntary parent-teen contract

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White today proposed legislation that will improve the Illinois Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Program that governs drivers up to the age of 21. The legislation is based on the recommendations of White's Teen Driver Safety Task Force.

"Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among adolescents," White said. "Last summer, I formed a task force to address this very serious problem and our mission was clear: to develop legislation that will strengthen the Illinois GDL law and reduce fatal crashes involving teen drivers.

"This legislation, based on the recommendations of my task force, is proof of what can be accomplished when you put together a group of intelligent, caring individuals with a strong desire to solve a problem. But the greater result of their effort will be a reduction in fatal crashes involving teen drivers in Illinois when these recommendations become law."

White's task force, composed of legislators, traffic safety experts, law enforcement officials, educators, judges and victim advocates held three public hearings in Springfield, Carterville and Chicago to study proposals aimed at keeping teen drivers safe. After listening to hours of testimony and reviewing several studies the committee released a final report that served as the basis for legislation that would make the Illinois GDL program one of the most comprehensive in the nation and a model for other states to follow. The legislation includes the following provisions:

- Extend the permit phase from three months to nine months. This proposal will give the novice driver more time to learn under the watchful eye of parents through a variety of weather conditions common throughout Illinois.
- Shift the nighttime driving restriction from 11 p.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays and from Midnight to 11 p.m. on weekends for all drivers under the age of 18 and those who fail to graduate from the initial licensing phase. This nighttime driving restriction does have exemptions for traveling to and from school sponsored activities and work.

The risk of fatal crashes involving 16 and 17-year-old drivers is three times higher from 10:00 p.m. to midnight than from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., according to a study by the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health.

- Double the period – from six months to 12 months – that restricts a new driver to a maximum of one unrelated teen passenger.

The Johns Hopkins Study also concluded that the driver death rate for 16-year-old drivers rose sharply for each additional passenger in the vehicle. Based on studies and testimony, White's task force concluded that distractions from other teen passengers are one of the leading causes of traffic crashes involving 16-year-old drivers.

- Ticket the passengers age 15 to 20, in addition to the drivers, who violate the passenger restriction law. White's task force felt that a teenager's actions are often motivated by consequences or lack thereof. This proposal places responsibility on both the passengers and the driver to abide by the passenger limitation provision.
- Require student drivers to complete a minimum six hours of actual, on-the-street driving with a certified driver education instructor. This proposal eliminates the provision that allows students in high school driver education classes to take a proficiency exam after completing just three hours of practice driving. In addition, it removes current exemptions that allow the use of driving simulators and driving ranges as a substitute for street driving with a certified driver education instructor.
- Implement a true Graduated Driver Licensing system that requires new drivers to earn their way from one stage to the next. Under this proposal, once issued a learner's permit, a teen would be required to drive conviction-free for nine months before he or she would be eligible for a driver's license. The teen would then also have to drive conviction free for six months in addition to reaching age 18 before moving from the initial licensing phase to the full licensing phase.

Until graduating to the full licensing phase, these young drivers would be subject to the limitations of the initial phase that include the nighttime driving restriction and cell phone ban among others.

- A stricter law in which the drivers' licenses of those under age 21 would be suspended for each additional conviction following a driver's initial suspension for two moving violations in a 24-month period. This provision puts young drivers on notice that once their drivers' licenses have been suspended, each additional conviction until they turn 21 will result in another suspension of their driving privileges.
- Require drivers under age 18 who are ticketed for traffic violations to appear before a judge with a parent or guardian to receive court supervision. This legislation also requires the attendance of traffic school as a requisite for court supervision for drivers under the age of 21. This ensures that the parent or guardian is fully aware of the minor's traffic violation and understands the requirements and ramifications of court supervision.
- Establish tough, new penalties – including license revocation and vehicle impoundment – for drivers who are involved in street racing. Street racing has become a deadly phenomenon that encourages drivers to race on city streets, highways and interstates. Harsh, no-nonsense penalties are needed to combat and punish this deadly, thrill-seeking behavior.

In addition to the legislation, White recommended various procedural and administrative changes that will further improve driver education and teen driver safety. Those measures include a voluntary contract that allows parents to establish written guidelines for their children to follow in order to keep their driving privileges. White's office will work with the Illinois Parent Teacher Association and Driver Education Industry to create a guidebook to help educate parents and teens about the GDL law and to provide safe driving tips. White said he would establish a committee headed by the State Board of Education to update Illinois Driver Education Standards and urge the State Board of Education to establish mandatory parent-child meetings with driver education instructors before students may enroll in driver education classes.

“This is a very comprehensive proposal with many tough, yet sensible, new rules for our teen drivers,” said White. “But they are being proposed with the sole purpose of reducing teen driving crashes and fatalities.”