



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

For Immediate Release:
October 20, 2009

For More Information Contact:
Dave Druker
Henry Haupt

Jesse White Announces Teen Driving Deaths Down 50 Percent as this Week Marks National Teen Driver Safety Week

Honors Maine South High School for Outstanding Driver Education Program

Secretary of State Jesse White announced today that teen driving deaths in Illinois dropped by more than 50 percent since Illinois' nationally heralded graduated driver licensing (GDL) law took effect in 2008. While 2008 saw a decrease of 40 percent in teen crash fatalities, the first nine months of 2009 have experienced an additional reduction of 10 percent. Comparing the first nine months in 2009 with the same time period in 2007 – the year before Illinois' stronger GDL law became effective – results in a more than 52 percent reduction in teen driving deaths.

“I am pleased that this law is working as we intended,” said White. “The goal all along was to save lives. When I first convened the Teen Driver Safety Task Force in 2006, we knew we had our work cut out for us. We knew that automobile crashes were the leading cause of death for teens, and we worked hard and put together one of the best GDL programs in the nation. While too many teens are still dying on our roads, we can take some solace in the fact that fewer teens have died in crashes the last two years.”

The new law initiated by White better prepares novice, teen drivers by giving them more time to obtain valuable driving experience while under the watchful eye of a parent or guardian, limiting in-car distractions, and requiring teens to earn their way from one stage to the next by avoiding traffic convictions. State and national traffic safety organizations have praised Illinois' stronger GDL law as one of the best in the nation.

In 2007, 155 teens age 16-19 were killed in automobile crashes. In 2008, 93 teens died in crashes. From January 1 through October 10, 2007, 127 teens died in crashes. During the same time frame in 2009, 60 teens were killed, a reduction of 52.7 percent. Sixty-seven teens died in automobile crashes during this same time period in 2008. Of these totals, teen drivers accounted for 69 crash fatalities during the first nine months of 2007, 43 in 2008 and 32 in 2009, which represents a 53.6 percent reduction in teen driver deaths when comparing 2007 to 2009.

White made the announcement during National Teen Driver Safety Week at a press conference at Maine South High School in Park Ridge where he presented a Teen Driving Safety Award to school officials for their outstanding driver education program. White emphasized the important roles that parents, high schools and driver education instructors play in preparing safe and responsible teen drivers.

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“We have formed a partnership between the Secretary of State’s office, parents, schools and driver education instructors,” said White. “Working together, we are saving lives and making our roads safer.”

For the past two years, Maine South High School’s driver education program has challenged its students to be actively involved in the peer-led Operation Teen Safe Driving program sponsored by the Illinois Department of Transportation. Additionally, Maine South High School promotes students to actively participate in traffic safety awareness by inviting local law enforcement and other safety groups to the driver education classroom.

“Our number one priority is safety and we strive each day to reduce the number of fatalities in our state,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Gary Hannig. “With the GDL program and the Operation Teen Safe driving program, we have made great strides in saving lives, but there’s still work to be done. We will continue to work closely with our partners and our teens to keep bringing the number of teen deaths down in Illinois.”

Illinois’ GDL law, sponsored by Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago) and Representative John D’Amico (D-Chicago), has received acclaim nationally, including Washington, D.C.

“It is always such good news to hear of fewer teen deaths and Illinois' tough GDL program is one of the major reasons for this positive outcome,” said Judith Lee Stone, President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, based in Washington, D.C. “Secretary White and other safety leaders have been at the forefront of this battle to save lives and reduce injuries involving new teen drivers on Illinois roadways. We know that motor vehicle-related deaths decline in times of economic stress, but these dramatic reductions are also due to the exemplary GDL policies in place in Illinois that promote the development of safer and more experienced teen drivers. Thank you and keep up the good work.”

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