



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Ortt Introduces Legislation That Strengthens Criminal Penalties for Work Zone Crashes

ROBERT G. ORTT June 1, 2015

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Bill to Create New Crimes of Vehicular Assault and Manslaughter in Work Zones Passes in Senate

State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) has introduced critical measures to help protect workers in active work zones and deter erratic and distracted driving in these zones. Recently passed in the Senate, the bill (S2975) would strengthen criminal penalties for motorists driving recklessly in work zones.

The bill would create the new crimes of first and second-degree vehicular assault (class D and E felonies), and first and second-degree vehicular manslaughter in an active work zone (class B and C felonies). In addition, the bill would create a class B misdemeanor for the crime of intrusion into an active work zone causing serious injury.

“The risks work zone crew members face on a daily basis to help fix our roadways or maintain our structures are far too grave,” said **Sen. Ortt**. “We need to ensure that motorists drive at a safe speed, pay attention to their surroundings, and refrain from texting and other distractions while behind the wheel. Construction workers and law enforcement working in work zones are far too often putting their lives on the line to help keep us safe. Now we need to do our part to protect them.”

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, an average of nearly 600 work zone fatalities occur nationwide every year, and more than 32,000 people are injured each year as a result of work zone car crashes. In New York State alone, the state DOT said there were five work zone deaths in 2010; six in 2009; six in 2008; and 11 deaths in 2007.

CSEA Region VI President Florence Tripi said, “We applaud Senator Ortt’s leadership in recognizing how important it is to safeguard the workers who care for our roads and highways. Far too many have lost their lives to negligent and distracted drivers, and we believe this bill will prevent accidents, injuries, and deaths. We thank Senator Ortt and the rest of the senators who supported this legislation, and we call on the Assembly to quickly move on this important legislation.”

Co-sponsor of the bill, Assemblyman Steve Hawley (R,C,I – Batavia) said, “Work and construction zone injuries and fatalities are a serious problem in New York State. Additional protections are necessary to deter reckless drivers and those who dangerously exceed the speed limit in work zones where increased caution is imperative to protect police officers and construction employees. I am pleased to see the Senate pass this legislation, which I have championed for a number of years. I hope the Assembly will do the same before the end of this year’s legislative session.”

The bill has been sent to the Assembly.