



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senate Introduces Package Of Legislation To Keep NY's Young Drivers Safe

CATHARINE YOUNG

Members of the New York State Senate Majority Conference today introduced SAFE-TEEN New York, a comprehensive package of legislation designed to keep New York's younger, less experienced drivers safe while on the road and prevent future tragic accidents.

The package of bills was announced today at a Capitol news conference, where the Senators were joined by John Arout of Staten Island, whose 17 year old daughter Michelle was killed in a high speed crash while the driver of her car was racing another teen driver.

According to the National Traffic Safety Administration, traffic accidents are the leading cause of death for persons ages 15 to 20. Teen drivers, mile to mile, are in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers. More than 7,000 teens die annually in traffic crashes.

The SAFE-TEEN New York driver safety package includes legislation to:

> S.8020 - Increase the penalties for street racing from a misdemeanor offense to a felony for repeat offenders;

> S. 8124 - Limit the number of non-family member passengers under the age of 21 that can be riding in a car when the driver holds a class DJ or class MJ learners permit or license;

- > S. 8018 - Require parents or legal guardians to attend court appearances when teen drivers are issued traffic violations;
- > S. 8017 - Authorize DMV to produce a SAFE-TEEN NY sticker and make the sticker available to all parents and legal guardians. These optional stickers, which could be placed on certain vehicles, would help alert law enforcement and other drivers to the fact that a car is being driven by a young, and potentially inexperienced, driver;
- > S. 8019 - Establish the SAFE-TEEN New York Driver Safety Commission, a 12-member panel of experts who would examine a wide array of factors that contribute to the high rate of car accidents involving teen drivers and make recommendations for new programs, policies, and statutes to improve teen driver safety; and
- > S.4698 - Increase the number of supervised hours required before the issuance of a class DJ or class MJ license from twenty to fifty, and ensure that at least some of those hours consist of night driving.

Last July, 17-year-old Michelle Arout was riding in the back seat of a car whose teen driver was involved in a high speed race against another teen. The two cars collided while driving between 80 and 90 miles per hour, causing the car Michelle was riding in to swerve off the road and crash. The impact sliced the vehicle in half and ejected Michelle from the back seat.

"This was a tragedy that was completely preventable," said John Arout. "Our hope is to prevent other families from going through this pain -- no parent should have to bury their child. We're not trying to stop teens from driving. We're trying to prevent crashes and save lives."

Earlier this month, three people lost their lives in two deadly accidents on the same day in Queens and Buffalo. Both accidents were the result of suspected drag racing.

Five-year-old Jordan McLean of Queens was thrown from his aunt's SUV and killed after their vehicle was struck by suspected drag racers. Jordan and his aunt, Claris Edwards, were driving on 109th Avenue in Queens -- a drag racing hot spot -- when they were faced with two cars head on. After colliding with one car, the other drove off and did not return, while the passengers of the car that hit them fled the scene and have not been located by police.

Later the same day, a young man and woman were killed when their car crashed into a utility pole in a suburb of Buffalo. Police suspect they were involved in a drag race at the time of the accident.

Legislation (S.8332) would prohibit the use of any and all electronic devices for drivers under the age of eighteen, including but not limited to iPods, texting devices and cell phones, including hands-free cell phones This "driver distraction" bill builds on legislation passed earlier this week that would prohibit drivers from writing, sending or reading text messages while driving.

Last month, the Senate passed legislation (S.6985) that would create an advisory panel on driver education availability and curriculum enhancement, in order to improve the quality and availability of driver education in New York State.