



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Jason's Law Needed To Protect Truck Drivers

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Truck drivers. We see them every day on the highway, and while we have a basic understanding of what they do, we don't always realize the rigors and risks of the essential job they perform. The vast majority put in long hours away from home so they can earn a living wage and support their families. Along with the dangers one would expect that come with the job of driving an eighteen wheeler – road hazards, equipment malfunctions and driver error – there are other, more sinister threats.

On March 5, 2009 Jason Rivenburg, a truck driver from Schoharie County, was killed while resting in his rig at an abandoned gas station in South Carolina. At the time of his senseless death, Jason was a mere twelve miles from his destination but was unable to make his delivery because he was too early. The tragic situation highlights the seriousness of the problem surrounding the lack of available, safe and secure parking facilities for truckers.

We rely on commercial trucks to transport the goods that are necessary to our economic well-being. It is vital that we also ensure that truck drivers who are transporting these essential products have a safe place to rest while they are waiting for pending appointments or in order to comply with federal “hours of service” regulations. Federal law mandates that drivers rest for ten hours after driving for eleven consecutive hours, and also prohibits them from driving more than sixty hours total over a seven day period.

If we are going to require truckers to take regular breaks, it is imperative that we provide them with safe places to rest. Presently there is a real shortage of safe parking areas for truck drivers, forcing many, like Jason, to park in isolated, poorly lit locations with little or no security.

Compounding the problem here in New York, the state Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) recently announced the closure of six rest areas on interstate highways starting November 1. The move is touted as a cost-saving measure, and while I understand the need to cut back in these tough fiscal times, I believe there are other areas that should be considered first, before weakening one of the few protective measures available to hard-working truck drivers.

Fortunately, there is a movement to strengthen truck driver safety. “[Jason’s Law](#)” is under consideration in Washington and, if approved by Congress, would authorize \$20 million annually over six years for grants to states to expand and publicize parking options for

commercial vehicles. The fund could be used by states for a variety of purposes, including: building new rest areas with adequate parking, expanding parking near truck stops and at existing facilities, as well as promoting and publicizing available parking options on the highway.

I have introduced legislation (senate bill 8113) at the state level that would provide a mechanism for utilizing the federal funding should it be approved.

The measure would mean an overall boost to highway safety. Supporters are quick to point out that the lack of truck parking facilities poses an extreme danger to the general public as well as professional truck drivers. If fatigued drivers are unable to find safe parking areas and remain on the highway, they compromise the safety of all drivers. Also, truckers many times are forced to pull over on the side of a road to rest, often on exit or entrance ramps, causing extreme highway safety risks for themselves and the general public

A comprehensive solution is needed, and "Jason's Law" is a step in the right direction. Jason's family is fighting for passage of the law and I stand firmly with them. Earlier this year Jason's wife Hope along with the couple's three young children and other family members joined me in Albany to witness senate passage of a resolution urging the federal government to enact "Jason's Law." The fight continues in Washington, and I urge you to contact your federal representatives and voice your support for "Jason's Law."

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