



American Red Cross

Greenwich Chapter

99 Indian Field Road
Greenwich, CT 06830
203.869.8444
www.greenwichredcross.org

March 5, 2009

Dear Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrero,
Ranking Member Boucher, and Ranking Member Scribner;

I am testifying today on behalf of the Greenwich Safe Rides Program. As the Director of Youth Services at the Greenwich Chapter of the American Red Cross, I am also the supervisor for this teen led program. I am submitting my testimony in favor of HB 6619, "exempting drivers in a "Safe Rides" program from the passenger restrictions applicable to sixteen and seventeen-year-old drivers."

Program description:

- Safe Rides is in our 26th year of the program. Our mission is to reduce the number of driving accidents in the teen population due to drug or alcohol use. To do this, we assist any teenager by providing them with a confidential and free safe ride home if they find themselves in any situation involving the presence of alcohol or drugs.
- Safe Rides runs on Friday and Saturday nights, from 10pm until 2am, 12 months of the year and has volunteers from all of our local public and independent schools.
- It is a student led program and we believe that it is the peer-to-peer quality and the confidentiality that comes from their similarity in age that makes this program so effective.

Training of new members:

- All incoming members must go through a 3-hour training session in order to join safe rides. The class includes basic CPR and first aid skills, the signs & symptoms of drinking & drug use, the policies and procedures specific to our program, and radio training for the two-way communication radios in each vehicle.
- We also have parents sign a parental permission form; the youth fill out and sign American Red Cross Volunteer applications, codes of conduct, and confidentiality agreements.

On a Safe Rides night:

- There is an *adult- on-premise* in the chapter building during the running of each Safe Rides night and there is an *adult-on-call* as well, in case of emergencies. There is also a student leader for each Safe Rides team, who has gone through an application and interview process, and additional training in order to be chosen as a team leader. These leaders have bi-monthly meetings with me and the other team leaders to discuss the running of the program.

- During the night, each call is documented and each ride is detailed with times and locations. When going out on a call, there are always two teenagers in a car, one male & one female (for gender neutrality). They use well marked chapter vehicles that are equipped with communication radios and first aid kits.
- During the ride, the driver drives while their team member, gives direction, gives updates to their team leader via the radio or cell phone, and keeps an eye on the passengers in the back seat. This system has proven efficient in keeping both the passengers and the driving team safe and focused on the task of getting safely to their destination.
- Safe Rides does not use I-95 or the Merritt parkway and stays within the boundaries of Greenwich; so the youth are only on local roads.

Statistics and Supporting Information:

- We average at providing 1160 safe rides home per year (ranging from 1012 to 1458 yearly) over the past 5 ½ years. Our projected total rides provided for this fiscal year is over 1100.
- We also continue to have the support of our local police department, schools, PTAs, and community members.
- We currently have about 330 youth (112 seniors, 124 juniors, 73 sophomores, 28 freshmen) and 20 adult volunteers in Safe Rides, with anywhere from 350 – 400 youth involved in the program over the course of a year.

What would happen if HB 6619 does not pass:

- On average, our volunteers get their license 7 months after they turn 16 years old. With the 1 year restriction, they will be over 17 ½ years old when they become eligible to drive. This puts the majority of them into the second half of their senior year in high school. This is the time when we start losing them as volunteers as they turn their focus on being college bound.
- This past fall, we started the school year with 50 students eligible to drive passengers. Without an exemption from the new 1 year passenger restriction, this number would dwindle to only 15 eligible drivers. During the fall months we had 15 more students become eligible to drive. None of these 15 would have been eligible to drive under the new restrictions. Thus leaving our program short 50 of our 65 drivers.
- Not having an exemption will force us to either shut down completely or drastically reduce our program. The number of rides given per month is in direct correlation to the number of volunteers participating that month. If we reduce the number of volunteers, we will reduce the service provided.

This chart illustrates our ride averages for each month over 5 ½ years and the average number of volunteers at Safe Rides each month over 3 ½ years.

	Ave. # of Rides Provided	Ave. # of Volunteer Service
July	85	75
August	59	70
September	117	103
October	79	76
November	110	123
December	84	102
January	96	98
February	74	80
March	118	105
April	109	94
May	120	99
June	111	98

I know that there are many of our supporters sending in letters and written statements testifying to the good our program does, not only for the youth who call for a ride home, but also for our volunteers in the program.

The youth involved in Safe Rides are receiving the message that not only is it not “cool” to drink and drive, but it is in their power to effect change and influence their peers for the better. They learn to work as a team, they make friends, and they identify with this program.

I thank you for your consideration and I implore you to vote in favor of HB 6619.

Sincerely,



Ivana Sain
Director of Youth Services
American Red Cross - Greenwich, CT
SainIv@usa.redcross.org