

Testimony

In Support of Raised H.B. 6619 AN ACT EXEMPTING DRIVERS IN A "SAFE RIDE" PROGRAM FROM THE PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS APPLICABLE TO SIXTEEN AND SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD DRIVERS.

**Transportation Committee
March 6, 2009**

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

I speak in favor of HB6619, "Exempting Drivers in a "Safe Ride" program from the Passenger Restrictions Applicable to Sixteen and Seventeen-year-old Drivers."

Without this exemption, Safe Rides will lose most of their drivers as they will not be allowed to have any passengers beyond family members for the first year of their license. We have always honored a 6-month passenger restriction, but the additional 6-month increase to 1-year total will most likely cause the program to falter. (High School Seniors are starting to turn 18 years of age the Spring of their Senior year in High School affording a very small pool of drivers at the end of the school year.) After 26 years of service to the Greenwich Community, we need to appeal to you, the transportation committee, so you know how valuable this youth program is to Greenwich and other communities.

Safe Rides is a program that prepares our children to lead safer lives committed to volunteerism. While it does provides a direct service to teens that have been drinking - in many cases the rides are given to teens that have found themselves in a situation where they just need a safe ride home. Our rides service various needs; calls come from youth whose driver is not fit to drive them home, they come from teen babysitters who don't want to be driven home by an inebriated parent and yes, some kids call because they have had too much. Whatever the reason - thank goodness they call and can get a safe ride home!

Each year, in Greenwich, more than 350 youth volunteer in this lifesaving program and over the last five years, more than 7,000 Safe Rides have been provided. As a Safe Rider, a child received intensive training that helped them serve their fellow teens:

- o They learned to assess and respond to emergency situations.
- o They acquired basic first aid and CPR skills.
- o They learned to recognize the signs and symptoms of drug and alcohol misuse.
- o They learned to be a member of a team and to lead their peers.
- o They made a commitment to volunteerism by participating in a youth-led program dedicated to the safety of their peers.

Through this Red Cross program Safe Riders receive strong guidance on how to lead safer lives with a clear message to avoid underage drinking and impaired driving. Today, our children continue to see volunteerism as a vital part of their lives and continue to advocate against drug and alcohol misuse.

At the Greenwich American Red Cross our Boar of Directors, Board of Advisors,. Volunteers and staff stand behind our Safe Rides Program and the service it offers to the Community. They favor the exempting of drivers to this new passenger restriction. It would be a great loss to our community to loose this program. In fact, Board Members of the Greenwich Chapter volunteered because of what their children personally gained from being part of Safe Rides. On our current Board of 30 members approximately one-third have had their children involved in the program. One Board member was actually a Safe Rider in her high school days and another Safe Rider is a teen representative on our Board.

Safe Rides is a way that the Red Cross reaches into our community and helps prepare, prevent and respond to emergencies.

Please take action to exempt drivers in a Safe Ride program from the Passenger Restrictions Application to 16 and 17 year old drivers.

Thank you!

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