

STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED HOUSE BILL 6122,

"To allow newly-licensed drivers to carry siblings as passenger"

February 14, 2011

This statement has been prepared by several members of Governor Rell's 2007-08 Safe Teen Driving Task Force; participants in the Connecticut Safe Teen Driving Partnership, which meets monthly and is facilitated by the Connecticut Children's Medical Center; members of IMPACT, Mourning Parents Act; and other members of Connecticut's traffic safety community. Specific organizations and individuals who endorse this statement are listed at the end.

We strongly oppose H.B. 6122, which would "allow newly-licensed drivers to carry siblings as passengers," for these reasons:

1. Study after study during the past decade has documented beyond argument that crash rates of newly-licensed teen drivers increase significantly when they have one or more passengers other than a supervising adult driver. Three such studies are attached: (a) a 2009 study by the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety; (b) a 2007 study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, which specifically addresses the risks of siblings as passengers; and (c) a recent Fact Sheet prepared by Advocates for Auto and Highway Safety, which is a proponent of federal legislation known as the Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act, which seeks to encourage states to adopt *longer* passenger restrictions than Connecticut's current law.

These are recent, national, well-documented studies by the nation's leading traffic safety organizations, and they show H.B. 6122 as directly contrary to existing evidence regarding teen driver safety.

2. Fatality statistics show a correlation between novice drivers and passengers. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) maintains a Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). The FARS report shows that from 2005 to 2009, twenty-five 16 and 17 year old drivers died, along with 19 of their passengers.

3. H.B. 6122 reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the dangers of teen driving. The bill appears to assume that a teenager who is duly-licensed by the State of Connecticut is a safe driver. This is simply not the case, for at least three reasons: (a) the brains of teenagers suffer from a chemical imbalance that encourages risk-taking and discourages caution, and this condition does not dissipate until ages 22 to 25; (b) it takes three to five years of experience to create a safe driver, which is far more than the mere 40 hours that Connecticut requires for a license; and (c) we train new drivers on streets in their hometowns, but then they routinely drive in places they have never been before, so they are learning to handle a vehicle and navigate at the same time – a daunting challenge even for experienced drivers. Our age-of-licensing laws, unfortunately, are based more on tradition than science or traffic safety facts. Allowing siblings as passengers of newly-licensed teen drivers is guaranteed to increase crash rates and put both teen drivers and their siblings at risk.

4. **H.B. 6122 proposes to repeal the recommendation on this exact subject of the 2007-08 Task Force, which spent considerable time on it, with help of national experts and NHTSA. The Task Force's recommendation to lengthen passenger restrictions by prohibiting siblings as passengers for the first six months of licensure was a modest amendment that should not be changed without compelling evidence; as noted, the current evidence warrants, if anything, even longer restrictions on passengers and siblings than were adopted in 2008. Rolling back these provisions is simply unwarranted.**

It appears that underlying H.B. 6122 is convenience for parents, a desire to help busy mothers and fathers with transporting their kids to school and events. It may be that Committee members have received calls from parents who would like to change our teen driving laws to accommodate their schedules. We can acknowledge the realities that parents are busy and much of our society is automobile-dependent, **but our teen driving laws should not put convenience ahead of safety.** Driving remains the leading cause of death of people under age 20 in the United States. H.B. 6122 does not reflect an accurate understanding of the dangers of teen driving, and we encourage the Transportation Committee to reject it. Thank you.

STATEMENT ENDORSED BY

Brendan Campbell, MD, MPH, Medical Director, Pediatric Trauma Program, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, and Task Force member

Sherry Chapman, Task Force member, President, IMPACT, www.mourningparentsact.org

Connecticut Safe Teen Driving Partnership, c/o Kevin Borrup, JD, MPA, Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Tim Hollister, Task Force member; publisher of From Reid's Dad, www.fromreidsdad.org, a national blog for parents of teen drivers

Garry Lapidus, PA-C, MPH, Director, Injury Prevention Center, Connecticut Children's Medical Center / Hartford Hospital

Pina Violano, MSPH, RN-BC, CCRN, PhD(c), Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital