



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

REPRESENTATIVE LEONARD GREENE, JR.
ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

ROOM 4200
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

1-800-842-1423
FAX: 860-240-0270
Len.Greene@housegop.ct.gov

MEMBER
ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Honored Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Transportation Committee,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for raising House Bill 6120 as a Committee Bill and offer this testimony in favor of the proposal.

As most of us have seen in our districts there seems to be a growing trend in which homemade memorials are being erected to honor those unfortunate individuals who have been killed in motor vehicle accidents. Often erected by loved ones who have suffered through this traumatic experience, these memorials can prove to be very cathartic to those who have been left behind.

Unfortunately these memorials also often prove to be a dangerous distraction to other drivers. Many memorials include personal belongings from the deceased individual's life. In my district alone I have seen memorials that include large stuffed animals and toys, signs, crosses, wreaths, sports memorabilia, bottles of alcohol, and even a small fire pit. While this may help the family or friends of a loved one grieve, it also serves as a major distraction to drivers in the area. To make matters worse, many of these memorials are erected on the most dangerous areas of a road where accidents are most likely to occur. Because of this the DOT is required to remove these memorials, which can be a difficult issue for both the family and the workers to handle.

This bill offers a potential solution to this dilemma by allowing families to erect temporary memorials installed and maintained by the state at little to no cost to the taxpayers. Ideally the program will significantly reduce the number of distractions on our roadways while also serving a valuable public service. There are already numerous states that offer this type of program to their citizens throughout the United States. I've included in my testimony an OLR report that highlights some of these programs.

Given our current economic situation and the lack of funding available for new programs, I would recommend that the committee require all fees to be paid by the family requesting the memorial. I would also recommend that the committee adopt several of the regulations that other states have implemented. The State of California currently maintains that signage cannot be erected if any member of the immediate family issues a written request that it not be erected. The State of Florida maintains the signage for up to 1 year, which will help us to prevent an overload of memorials on our roadways. I would also recommend that the committee authorize the DOT to use some level of discretion with regard to the actual location of a memorial. Public safety should be the number one priority and the Department should be afforded the authority to preserve that priority.

There may be other issues that need to be ironed out before this program can be implemented, but I do believe that this will help to make our roads safer while also providing a valuable service to those grieving families who have suffered such a tragedy. I hope that the committee will consider moving this bill forward.



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

October 5, 2007

2007-R-0580

ROADSIDE MEMORIALS IN OTHER STATES

By: Ryan F. O'Neil, Research Assistant

You asked if any states erect signs along highways at the sites of fatal crashes that memorialize the victims.

In a 2006 survey conducted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 36 states responded to requests for information about roadside memorial policies. Of those responding, 15 states had an official policy, 17 had no policy, and four were considering a program at the time of the survey.

States having official policies split into two groups. Some states, such as California and Colorado, erect official signs, usually for a fee that covers the cost of the sign and its installation and maintenance. The signs will bear a message of "Please Drive Safely" or something similar. If the victim died as a result of a drunk-driving accident, the sign might say, "Please Don't Drink and Drive." Below that sign, a smaller sign will say something akin to, "In memory of" and then the victim's name. Some states will only erect signs for drunk-driving victims while other states will erect the same sign regardless of the type of accident.

Other states, such as Alaska, allow private citizens to erect their own memorial. Alaska allows the memorials to be placed for two years. A memorial can be erected at or near the spot on the highway where the accident or incident took place, so long as it is on the side of the road or highway and away from bridges, culverts, and pipes and inside guardrails. Alaska's Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Mary M. Janicki, Director
Phone (860) 240-8400
FAX (860) 240-8881
<http://www.cga.ct.gov/olr>

Connecticut General Assembly
Office of Legislative Research

Room 5300
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106-1591
Olr@cga.ct.gov

publishes a pamphlet that gives guidelines on how to place a memorial and register it with the state. (Along with allowing privately constructed memorials, Alaska also erects official signs, too.)

The survey notes many states without an official policy allow private citizens to erect roadside memorials so long as they do not become traffic hazards.

We have attached the survey as well as a sample of policies from several states.