



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Charles J. Fuschillo Jr.

Stronger Penalties for Teens Who Text and Drive Passed by Senate

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Senator Charles J. Fuschillo, Jr. (R-Merrick), Chairman of the Senate's Transportation Committee, announced today that the New York State Senate has passed legislation to suspend the driver's licenses of teenage drivers who text or talk on a cell phone while driving. The legislation is sponsored by Senator Fuschillo and Senator Carl Marcellino (R-Syosset).

"Drivers who pay more attention to their cell phone than the road put everyone's safety at risk. Teenagers are both the most likely to drive distracted and the least experienced drivers on the road; that is a dangerous combination. Suspending teens' driver's licenses for committing a distracted driving offense will reinforce how serious and dangerous distracted driving is and give teens another reason to focus on the road, not their cell phone, when behind the wheel," said Senator Fuschillo.

"Whether it's texting, emailing, or talking on the phone, distracted driving is dangerous and potentially deadly. My life was forever changed by a distracted driver; I lost my parents and have physical and emotional wounds that will never heal. I never want that to happen to anyone else. Anything we can do to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving and discourage people from texting or talking on a cell phone while driving will make a difference and potentially save lives. The Senate's actions are another positive step in the fight against distracted driving," said Jacy Good, who was the victim of a crash caused by a distracted driver. Jacy's parents were killed in the crash.

Under the legislation (S5656) teens with a junior driver's license would have their license suspended for sixty days each time they commit a distracted driving violation. Teens and other newly licensed drivers who commit a distracted driving offense within the first six months of receiving their regular driver's license would face a sixty day license suspension for their first offense. Those who commit a subsequent offense within six months of having their license restored would face a six month license suspension. In each instance, the suspensions would be in addition to any other applicable penalties, including five driver license penalty points and monetary fines.

Distracted driving is a widely prevalent problem among teenagers. A survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that in 2011, 45% of all students ages 16 and older reported to texting or emailing while driving at least once in the past 30 days. Distracted drivers are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash than a non-distracted driver, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, and teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are three times more likely than drivers aged 20 or older to be in a fatal crash, according to the CDC.