

House Republican Press Release

March 18, 2008
Press Office: 860-240-8700

REP. FREY PUSHES GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO PASS SAFER DRIVING LAWS



State Representative John Frey (R- Ridgefield) announced he has co-sponsored legislation that will strengthen administrative and criminal penalties for operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, ban open containers in vehicles and tightens restrictions on teen drivers.

Teen driving and driving while intoxicated are among the issues under consideration by the General Assembly's Transportation Committee this year.

- Governor M. Jodi Rell proposed HB 5043, An Act Concerning Teen Drivers, based on the recommendations of her Teen Safe Driving Task Force. The legislation includes a provision that upon a referral to the state Department of Motor Vehicles by the arresting officer for operating under the influence, the license of a 16- or 17-year old driver would be suspended for a minimum of one year. The bill also calls for requiring 16- and 17-year old drivers whose licenses are suspended for operating while under the influence to complete a mandatory substance abuse training program.

“Authorities report that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of the death for 15 to 20 year olds. Restrictions such as this can help protect our youths and ensure safety on our roadways,” said Rep. Frey.

- Additionally, Rep. Frey has co-sponsored several bills dealing with strengthening laws on drinking and driving. An Act Concerning the Department Of Motor Vehicles and Administrative Per Se Procedures and Violations would eliminate “loopholes and trip wires for law enforcement while protecting due process.”
- Another drunk-driving related bill for extending the driver's license suspension for a first drunk driving conviction from one year to 18 months, but permits these offenders to drive after six months if their cars are equipped with an ignition interlock system.

Rep. Frey said, “The legislature should give law enforcement agencies all the available tools to fight the epidemic of drinking and driving. Ridgefield and the Greater Danbury

area have experienced too many tragic losses due to drunk driving. There cannot be enough officers on the road to stop every drunk driver, so proven effective laws, initiatives, and technologies all play a critical role in eliminating drunk driving.”

In testimony submitted to the legislature's Transportation Committee, Rep, Frey said, "In Connecticut, the number of fatalities involving a drunk driver with a reading of at least .08 rose from 98 in 2005 to 109 in 2006, an 11% increase that gave Connecticut the 9th highest increase in the United States. Ignition interlock devices have a clear record of reliability and success. Its expanded usage can save lives and should."

Rep. Frey has been a long-time advocate for a bill that calls for banning open containers of alcohol in the passenger areas of motor vehicles. In 2007, he worked in the last hours of the session to have an open container ban bill called in the House for a vote. While the vote didn't occur, he received a pledge from the House Chairman of the Transportation Committee to fully debate the issue this year.

Rep. Frey added, “An open container of alcohol in a vehicle can clearly lead to an intoxicated motorist and passage of this law is just common sense. However, the fact that we continue to lose out on millions of dollars in federal transportation funding because we don't have the ban means we can no longer afford to wait to enact this legislation.”

“The Legislature’s top responsibility must be to ensure public safety,” said Rep. Frey. “State by state, a variety of initiatives to protect us from intoxicated drivers has been put into effect. While we have had an opportunity to implement a variety of measures to address these issues and monitor their effectiveness in recent years, it is clear more must be done.”

Rep. Frey, House Republican Whip, serves the 111th Assembly District of Ridgefield in the state House of Representatives.