

**Graduated Driver Licensing**  
**HB 67 – HB 2070 Press Event**  
**May 3, 2010**

My name is Dr. Daniel Wehner and for the past 10 years, I have served as the Chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Memorial Medical Center of the Conemaugh Health System in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Conemaugh is a Level I Trauma Center that sees over 1,000 serious trauma cases per year. Of those traumas, 25% involve automobile crashes. And of those automobile crashes, 15 % involve teenagers. I have witnessed firsthand the devastating effects these traumas have, not only on the victim, but the victim's family and friends. In many cases, these traumas could have been avoided by doing simple things like putting on a seat belt or turning off a cell phone. In many cases, distractions such as too many teenagers in the vehicle caused these young drivers to take their eyes off the road for just a few seconds – and, in the process, change lives forever.

That is why I am here today. I would like to urge the State Senate to adopt the elements contained in two bills that would strengthen Pennsylvania's Graduated Drivers License law.

I would like to personally thank Representative Joseph Markosek for introducing these bills and for working hard to make sure that they both passed the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. We're asking the Pennsylvania Senate to do the same before they adjourn for the primary election.

House Bill 67 supports parents who are trying to set and enforce proper driving rules for their teenage sons and daughters. It would establish passenger restrictions for those younger than 18, ban the use of cell phones and texting, and require the driver and passengers up to age 18 to wear a seat belt. House Bill 2070 would reinforce the provisions in House Bill 67 by establishing a public education and awareness program, and most importantly, ban all drivers in Pennsylvania from using handheld cell phones and texting while operating a motor vehicle.

The Senate recently changed a critical section of House Bill 67. The presence of young passengers is a major contributor to the teenage death toll. With just one passenger, their risk of a fatal crash doubles;

three or more passengers quadruple the risk. We strongly support the original passenger limitation language that was in the version of House Bill 67 that was adopted by that chamber.

Pennsylvania is one of the last states to limit passengers for teen drivers. All the states bordering Pennsylvania allow only 0 or 1 teen passenger.

The House passed House Bill 67 in April of 2009. House Bill 2070 was passed by that chamber in January of this year. Senate adoption is long overdue. And Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly support the core principles in these bills.

Recent studies indicate that parents support passenger restrictions. According to a AAA Pennsylvania Federation survey, 96% of the AAA Pennsylvania members support limiting the number of passengers that teens may include in a car.

Regarding cell phone use and texting, a 2009 Quinnipiac poll, reports that nearly nine out of 10 Pennsylvanians support a ban on text messaging while driving and agree that it is a good idea to prevent teens with junior driver's licenses to use handheld phones while driving.

Motor vehicle crashes are the No. 1 killer of Americans ages 15 to 20. That is an unfortunate and all too real statistic that I live with almost every day in my emergency department.

Please, let me take a few moments to tell you about 2 personal stories concerning automobile crashes involving teen drivers, whose victims were taken to Memorial Medical Center of Conemaugh Health System.

A teenage girl accidentally dropped her cell phone while driving. She unhooked her seatbelt and while reaching down to the floor, to try to find her phone, started to run off the left side of the road. She over-corrected, then ran into an embankment off the right side of the road. She sustained significant injuries, including a fractured forearm and ankle. Most devastating were her facial injuries, which required multiple plastic surgeries, leaving significant scarring, and the permanent loss of her left eye. But fortunately, she survived.

Another, more tragic story, is that of a teen driver, distracted by other teens while driving. He ran through a stop sign at a high rate of speed, plowed into the side of a minivan containing a family of 4, who were returning from a family funeral. While no one in the teen's car was seriously injured, the innocent occupants of the van fared far worse. I'll never forget the sound of the father's anguished cries when he was told that his wife, 3-year-old daughter and 1-year-old son could not be revived and all died from the crash.

House Bill 67 is called "Lacey's Law" in memory of another teen who lost her life because of distracted driving. Lacey Gallagher was an 18-year-old Philadelphia high school student who died in 2007 after her vehicle hit a cement barrier while driving with six other teenage passengers on the way to a post-prom party.

Our second speaker today, Mrs. Marlene Case of Lower Pottsgrove, is an emergency department nurse at the Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia. Mrs. Case lost her son, Andrew, in a motor vehicle crash last November.

Karen Cantamaglia, another mother who lost her son in the same crash would like to say a few words.

I am honored to introduce Representative Joseph Markosek. Representative Markosek is chairman of the House Transportation Committee and the prime sponsor of these life-saving bills.

Close:

The medical community: the Pennsylvania Medical Society, The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania Academy of Pediatrics, and other want to see Senate action before the primary recess.

Again, Pennsylvania is one of the last states to set passenger restrictions for teen drivers. It is time...in fact...it is long overdue to upgrade the Graduated Driver Licensing provisions in our existing law with these reasonable, and necessary additional life-saving provisions that will go a long way toward preventing teenage motor vehicle crashes – and reserving prom season as a time of happy memories.