



[Contact Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [About Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Email Subscription](#)

TimesCommunity.com
Your weekly newspaper, daily

THURSDAY 23 MARCH, 2006

Partly Cloudy 42°
5 Day Forecast 

House panel says it is OK for teens to chat and drive

By Pat Kane

Capital News Service
03/08/2006

[Email to a friend](#) [Post a Comment](#) [Printer-friendly](#)

For the second year in a row, efforts by Sen. Jay O'Brien (R-Fairfax) to prevent teen drivers from using cell phones while behind the wheel of a car have been thwarted.

Last week's 3-2 vote on O'Brien's proposal (Senate Bill 137) in a House Transportation subcommittee was so close that its chairman took a recount.

Del. Danny Bowling (R-Tazewell), who voted against the bill, said he was worried it would prevent parents from staying in contact with their children.

O'Brien did include a provision allowing teens to pull off to the side of the road to make or receive a call, but Bowling said finding a safe place might take a while on rural roads and could put someone out of cellular service range.

"I can't believe that any parent feels the need to get in touch with their child so instantaneously that they're willing to jeopardize that child's safety on the roadway," said Nancy Rodrigues of the Virginia Association of Driver's Education and Traffic Safety.

Rodrigues and others said young people are more likely to talk and text-message on phones than other drivers, which puts them and their fellow motorists at risk.

"As a parent of a teen, I'd rather wait five minutes for my son to pull over to a safe location than to be on the phone with him when he T-bones another car," said Martha Rowe Mitchell of AAA Mid-Atlantic.

Kay Wright, of Harrisonburg, lost her son, Jeremy, when a high school student talking on a cell phone ran a red light.

"I feel like there were a few individuals on the committee that were really thinking about their own opinion rather than doing what's best," Wright said after testifying and hearing the vote.

O'Brien refused to accept an amendment allowing the use of hands-free devices, citing an Australian study that concluded the risk of accident was equal for hands-free and hand-held phones.

House members also pushed for a hands-free provision last year, but O'Brien objected.

"Driving for teens should be a 100 percent experience, not a 70-30 experience," he said after last week's vote. "And which is getting the 70? The driving or the cell phone use?"

Young drivers need to accrue miles of experience without incident, O'Brien told the panel.

Capt. Steve Chumley, legislative liaison for the Virginia State Police, said his agency supported the bill.

"We thought that it would reduce fatalities of provisional drivers," he said.

Subcommittee chairman Del. John Welsh III (R-Virginia Beach) said the bill was behind the times, noting the ever-expanding functions of cell phones. He said listening to music downloaded to a cell phone while driving would be illegal under the proposal.

Welsh also said the state risks usurping parental responsibilities by taking such actions.

"Parents have the right to take a cell phone away from a child. Parents have the right to say 'No' to texting while you're driving," he said.

The bill passed the Senate 30-7 in January, and O'Brien has vowed to introduce the bill again.

©Times Community Newspapers 2006

Reader Comments

[Submit your own comment!](#)

Added: Wednesday March 08, 2006 at 05:56 PM EST

A Better Way To Sell Real Estate!

The Bill Thomas Team



GREATER RESTON
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

VOTE
Kevin
WRIGHT



Avoid the



Teen Driving Law

It is beyond me that legislators cannot understand the need to have strict restrictions if they are going to continue to allow 16 year olds to obtain a driver license. They would have to be deaf, dumb and blind to not recognize the need for keeping our young people safe.

Too many parents do not take the danger of their child behind the wheel serious.

When one parent fails to keep their child safe, every teen that knows that teen is in danger. There are far more passengers killed in these tragedies then drivers.

My grandson and his best friend were killed by a 16 year old driver. My grandson's parents didn't know and would have not allowed him to be in that car, but, the driver's parents did know because they were the ones that invited my grandson to get into that car that fatal night.

Too many parents place other parents children in danger.

Dennis Damon, Kennewick, WA

[✉ Email to a friend](#) [📄 Post a Comment](#) [🖨 Printer-friendly](#) [↑ Top](#)

 Advertisement



A Better Way To Sell Real Estate!

You Show Your Property

SAVE!

We Do The Rest!

Help-U-Sell
REAL ESTATE
Full service. Big savings.
The experts next door.

*Click here to send us your community news, events, letters to the editor and other suggestions.
Click here to view our privacy policy.*



Copyright © 1995 - 2006 PowerOne Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved.