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James Sverapa IV
(609) 292-7065

CONTACT:

Assemblyman Chiappone
(201) 436-0473

Assemblyman Wisniewski
(732) 316-1885

Assemblywoman Lampitt
(856) 435-1247

CHIAPPONE/WISNIEWSKI/LAMPITT BILL PACKAGE **TO IMPROVE TEEN DRIVER SAFETY ADVANCES**

*Four-Bill Package Implements Priority Recommendations
Of the March 2008 Teen Driver Study Commission's Final Report*

(TRENTON) – A legislative package sponsored by Assembly members Anthony Chiappone, John S. Wisniewski and Pamela R. Lampitt to improve teen driver safety in New Jersey was released today by the Assembly Transportation, Public Works and Independent Authorities Committee.

The bills would implement the top recommendations of the state's Teen Driver Study Commission. "We need to give newly minted drivers the tools they need to become safe, responsible motorists," said Chiappone (D-Hudson). "Encouraging safe driving practices, enhancing penalties for bad driving and increasing the amount of time required behind the wheel will go a long way toward that goal."

The first measure (A-3067) would prevent provisional and learning drivers from using plea bargains on driving offenses to reduce the severity of the violation.

The second measure (A-3068) would revamp the state's graduated driver licensing law.

Under the bill, teen drivers with a learner's permit would have to log at least 50 hours of practice driving – including 10 hours of night driving – certified by a parent, guardian or supervising driver, along with the required six-hour driving course. Drivers age 17 to 20 who obtain an examination permit would be given the option to either complete the learner's permit certification requirements or complete 100 hours of certified driving, including 20 hours of night driving.

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Additionally, any driver under 18 years old would not be able to obtain a permit until their parent or guardian attends a teen driver orientation program approved by the state Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC). Drivers under 21 who have been issued learner's or examination permits would further be required to hold those permits for one year before being eligible for a provisional license.

The measure also would require the MVC to adopt a standardized, up-to-date curriculum to be used in public and private driving schools that would include private, one-on-one instruction for permit holders.

"The only way to become better at anything is through practice, and driving is no exception," said Wisniewski (D-Middlesex), the transportation panel chairman "Providing teen drivers with adequate behind-the-wheel time, standardized driver education and a healthy respect for the consequences of bad driving will help make them safer, more responsible motorists."

A third measure (A-3069) would require drivers who hold a learner's permit, examination permit or provisional driver's license to display an MVC-issued decal on the vehicle they are driving to aid law enforcement personnel in distinguishing between provisional and fully licensed drivers.

The decals would be removable and transferrable and be required to be displayed before a driver with a permit or provisional license operates the vehicle. Failure to display the decals would result in a \$100 fine per offense.

The final measure (A-3070) would revise the restrictions placed on drivers who hold permits and provisional driver's licenses.

Under the bill, the state's provisional driver's license would be renamed a "probationary driver's license." Any driver under 21 would be allowed to travel with only one passenger, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Restrictions on overnight driving would be extended by an hour, from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.

The measure would be named "Kyleigh's Law," in honor of Kyleigh Dalessio, a 16-year-old honor student and recognized athlete from Long Valley who died in an accident involving another young driver with multiple passengers in the vehicle.

"This package will help reinforce the message to teens that driving is a privilege, not a right," said Lampitt (D-Camden). "We need to better impress upon teens that getting behind the wheel carries with it real and tremendous responsibility for their passengers, other drivers and, most importantly, themselves."

The committee unanimously released the legislative package. It now heads to the Assembly Speaker, who decides if and when to post the bills for a floor vote.