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Teen driving and safety

Here's a sobering statistic from Illinois' Teen Driver Safety Task Force report: In 2005, 12.5 percent of drivers involved in fatal crashes nationally were between 15 and 20, yet this age group accounted for 6.3 percent of the driving population.

Despite that and other scary numbers, there is no political sentiment in Illinois to raise the driving age. So Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White spearheaded reforms to try to make young drivers safer.

His task force made multiple recommendations, everything from more practice time behind the wheel to greater restrictions on when teens can drive and with whom. Most ideas were incorporated into Senate Bill 172.

People watching the current bickering in Springfield might be surprised to learn that lawmakers sometimes work together. The bill passed 115-0 in the House and 54-2 in the Senate. It is awaiting Gov. Rod Blagojevich's signature.

We'll probably hear whining when most provisions kick on Jan. 1 that state government is picking on teens. But White and lawmakers hopefully have found a formula to help keep them alive.

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