

## OUR VIEW

# New teen driving restrictions broad, yet more needed

**T**hat fewer people died on Illinois highways last year than in the previous 82 is likely of little comfort to the families of nine teenagers killed on Tazewell County roads in 2006. While Tazewell has suffered more than its fair share of mourning, traffic deaths statewide were down nearly 100.

But the calendar has turned, and with it a new effort to make teens more prepared to take to the roads safely. The changes come from a task force appointed by Secretary of State Jesse White that sought to plug holes in Illinois' teen driving laws. Because her school lost seven present or former students, Pekin High School Superintendent Paula Davis was appointed to the panel. "It's a good start, but we still have more to do," she said.

Indeed, the proposal is broad, but not the last word. Its highlights:

- Tripling, to nine months, the time young drivers must hold a learner's permit.

- Prohibiting 16- and 17-year-olds from driving after 10 p.m. weekdays and 11 p.m. weekends, an hour earlier than presently allowed. Teens must be ticket-free for six months before driving restrictions would be eased.

- Allowing young drivers to carry only one teen passenger, other than family members, for 12 months, twice the current restriction.

- Mandating that public schools supervise on-the-road driving for six hours.

- Requiring parents to attend traffic court for their teen to get court supervision for breaking a driving law.

The package attacks some of the key factors that have made Illinois roads so deadly for kids. For instance, teens need more driving time with a parent or instructor to experience different circumstances and weather conditions. Teen fatalities rise dramatically after 9 p.m. and when cars are packed with passengers. The earlier curfew likely will be controversial because it would limit kids who work. Finally, the package recognizes that teens have a responsibility to *earn* the right to drive.

Legislative additions we'd like to see include requiring young drivers to attend safety classes as a condition of court supervision and mandating seat belt usage for back-seat passengers. A primary reason for the decline in fatalities in 2006 was that 88 percent of Illinois drivers are buckling in, up from 76 percent three years earlier. Requiring safety belts for those sitting in the rear would save even more lives.

There will be complaints about government interference in private affairs. But there's nothing private about our public roads. As such government has a right to regulate their use, from enforcing speed limits to seat belts. To do nothing is to endanger the public and invite more funerals for more kids. These measures should be a slam-dunk yes for legislators.