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OUR VIEW

Sign teen-driving safeguards

According to the insurance firm Allstate, we've just entered the deadliest stretch on the calendar for teenage vehicle fatalities: June, July and August. These months claim a disproportionate number of the roughly 6,000 young American lives lost in car crashes every year.

So with summer approaching, now is a highly appropriate time for Gov. Rod Blagojevich to sign a major update of Illinois' teen-driving laws. These reforms, proposed by Secretary of State Jesse White, met wide legislative support, sailing unanimously through the House and receiving only a pair of "no" votes in the Senate.

If they earn the governor's signature, Illinois will join the likes of North Carolina, considered the standard for graduated licensing laws, in sending a tough message to teens: Driving is a privilege you must work hard to earn.

Parents should like the proposed law because it attacks the root causes of many teen crashes. Illinois-based Allstate and other insurers keep hammering that these include speeding, running off the road and driving in unfamiliar conditions — snow, rain, dark. As such, Illinois would triple the duration teens must hold a permit, from three to nine months, to give them more

on-the-road learning. It also would slap an hour-earlier curfew on the under-18 set: 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday, with exemptions.

Teens should like one aspect of the law that gives them more time on the road instead of the classroom. Effective for the 2008-09 academic year, public schools would have to furnish six full hours of teacher-supervised driving. Currently, some driver's ed students can meet their requirements by using road simulators and practice courses.

Finally, we like the law because it hits close to home. Lake County has mourned 15 teenagers killed in vehicle crashes over the last two years. Two-hundred and sixty teens died in Illinois traffic in 2005. We'd like to see that list of names stop growing. To the degree that tougher training and more instruction and experience can help accomplish that, the governor should not hesitate to make this law.

Have an opinion? Be heard.

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