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Driving bill right idea

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Teenagers younger than 18 will face tougher driving restrictions if Gov. Rod Blagojevich signs a bill already approved by the House and the Senate.

The laudable goal of the new measure is to reduce the number of teenagers killed in automobile crashes. Whether the proposed changes will greatly reduce the number of teenagers killed in automobile crashes remains to be seen. The bill, if signed, will lengthen the period of time teenagers drive with a learner's permit from three months to nine months. The amount of training required will remain unchanged, at 50 hours. The bill should have increased the amount of training time needed during the learner's permit stage.

The bill also will move the night driving curfew up an hour to 10 p.m. during the week and until 11 p.m. during the weekend. Whether a one hour change makes a difference really will depend on local enforcement. Plus, there are exceptions to the rule for things like work and school events. Other changes, such as requiring six hours of supervised driving on actual streets, are important. This will require school districts to hire more instructors and rely less on simulators. Unfortunately, the measure is an unfunded state mandate.

The bill also will require 16- and 17-year-olds who get a ticket to appear in court in person to ask for supervision. Parents also will have to go to court. This might be the best part of the bill.

If the legislature really wanted to reduce the number of teenagers who die in automobile crashes, they simply would increase the driving age to 18. However, such a change would create problems for families that already are stretched thin. In most families, both parents work. And parents often rely on older children to run errands and pick up younger siblings. Also, most teenagers have to get to work themselves.

The intentions of the bill are good. Whether it results in fewer fatalities, well, we hope.

COMMENTS

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