

**The Department of Motor Vehicles**

# A Community Partnership for Saving Lives, Saving Teens

The DMV Center for Teen Safe Driving  
Report on Effectiveness of Connecticut's Teen Driving Laws  
August 2010

At the second anniversary of Connecticut imposing tougher teen driving laws on 16- and 17-year-olds, progressive evidence shows more acceptance of these laws as well as decreasing crashes, injuries and deaths among this age group in the state. A variety of data points to trends showing the desired effect of more safety awareness among teens and parents, and also more community involvement in prevention following the enactment August 1, 2008, of these new measures. (See video at <http://ct.gov/dmv/teendrivingrpt>)

Various reports and surveys indicate the following: An overwhelming number of parents find mandatory parent-teen education beneficial, the number of crashes for 16- and 17-year-old teen drivers has fallen, most convictions for teen-driving related offenses are down and licensing statistics show that the number of 16 year-olds hit an historic 12-year low in 2009. The exact reason for this decline hasn't been pinpointed, but David Preusser, principal in Preusser Research Group, Inc., a research firm in Trumbull that studies transportation and highway safety issues for state and federal government agencies, says it's a combination of issues. These include holding back licensing by either a parent or teen, a loss of extra family income reduces spending on either driver's education or vehicles, and teens' own desire to avoid the tougher restrictions the laws bring.

Safety advocates say these are all beneficial signals for the state's enhanced teen driving laws adopted as a result of a special Task Force convened in 2007 by Governor M. Jodi Rell. They also pointed out that continuous public awareness efforts are helping, too. These range from high schools' sponsoring mock crashes to show students devastating consequences of horrific car accidents to a variety of outreach efforts by state and federal officials, local and state police officers, public health leaders, organizations of bereaved parents and friends and major national insurance companies.

DMV Commissioner Robert M. Ward greeted the collective data as positive. "The test of whether enforcement and education are working rests in crash numbers. Clearly the numbers are down. We are on the right track, but more studies need to be done," he said, echoing safety advocates who hailed the good news, but said it is still too early to know whether these changes are permanent.

A series of high-profile crashes in 2007 triggered an intensive nine-month public awareness and law-changing campaign in 2008. Governor Rell formed a task force comprised of safety advocates including those from state and federal government, education, law enforcement, public health, medicine, parents and others to examine the issue and propose solutions. The task force recommended and the Governor signed into law tougher driving restrictions on 16 and 17 year-olds, more training requirements, tougher penalties for violating these laws, including license suspensions, and a mandatory two-hour training course that both the parent or guardian and young driver must attend together.

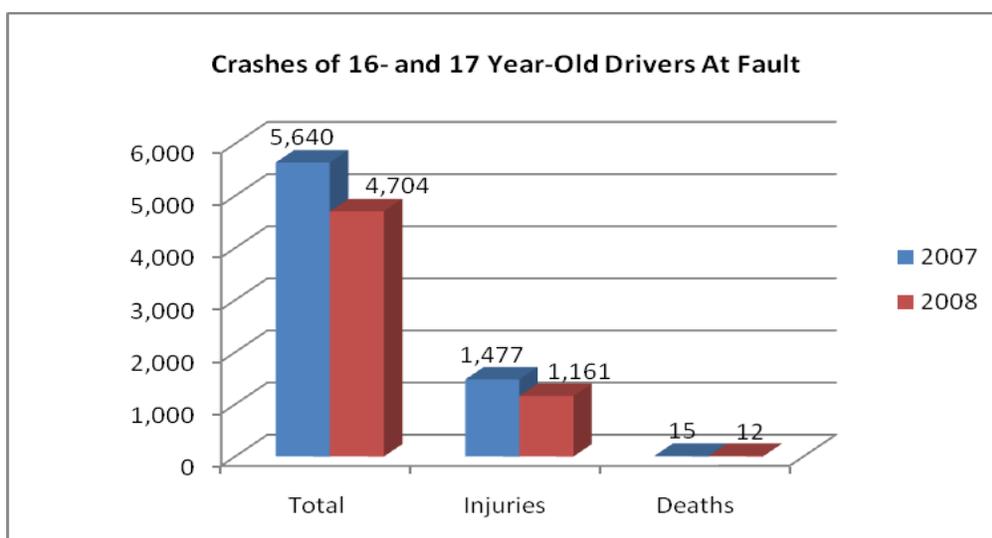
The public work of the task force also spawned border-to-border public awareness campaigns on teen safe-driving issues by many private and public organizations, such as schools, parent groups, insurance companies, hospitals and state government. These activities, which have continued long after the Task Force's proposed laws went into effect, most often engage teens and parents in safety awareness and why the new laws are designed to protect them.

From an injury prevention point of view, "This ounce of prevention is certainly worth its pound of cure and numbers show it," said Pina Violano, Injury Prevention Coordinator at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

Commissioner Ward added, "This kind of parent-teen as well as community public awareness is what we need to get to our end result of fewer crashes and the loss of fewer lives," he added.

### Reductions in Crashes

Recent statistics show that in accidents for 16- and 17-year-old drivers, who police determined to be at fault, the total number of crashes reduced by 16.6 percent for the year in which the new laws were adopted compared to the previous year. Fatalities in that two-year period dropped by 20 percent and injuries were cut by 21 percent.



A longer term study by the Connecticut Children's Medical Center shows reductions in crashes for drivers in this age group have been on a steady decline since the state began to address the teen driving issue aggressively

several years ago, according to researchers at CCMC. Over a 10-year study period (1999-2008) the motor-vehicle crash rate decreased 41 percent for 16-year-old drivers and 30 percent for 17-year-old drivers governed by the state's teen driving laws also known as a Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) system. In comparison, rates among drivers 18- and 19-years-old and a much older 30-to-59 age group dropped only 16 percent, 7 percent, and 10 percent respectively, according to Garry Lapidus, a researcher in Connecticut Children's Injury Prevention Center, who has studied teen driving and written extensively about it.

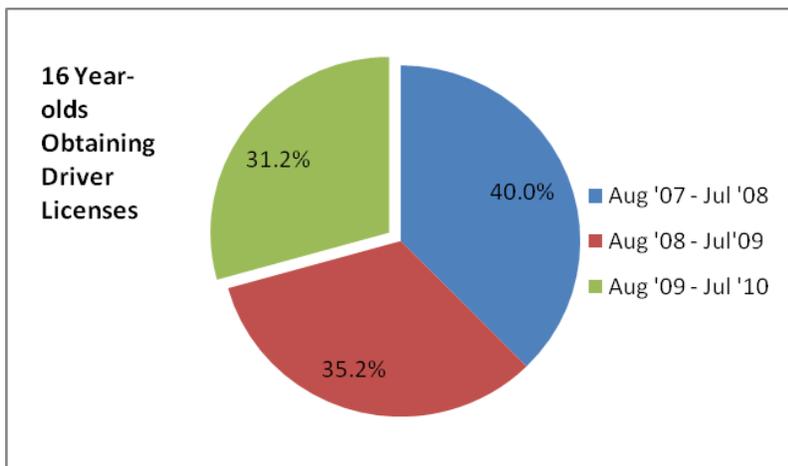
During teens' nighttime restricted driving hours, crash-related injuries decreased 54 percent among 16-year-old drivers and 58 percent among 17-year-old drivers. In comparison, injuries among 18- and 19-year-old drivers and those in the 30-to-59 age group reduced by only 36 percent, 45 percent, and 29 percent respectively, he said.

Crashes that involved passengers decreased 65 percent among 16-year-old drivers and 52 percent among 17-year-old drivers, Lapidus pointed out, noting that the decreases were significantly less with drivers over 18 years old.

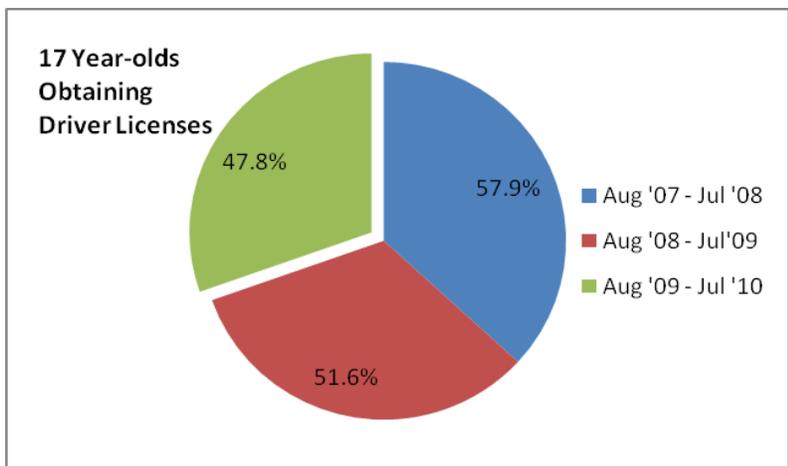
“The researchers at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center concluded that implementation of Connecticut’s GDL system has resulted in significant reductions in crashes and injuries,” he said.

**Drop in Licensing Numbers**

However, reduced crashes show only one of the positive effects from law changes and public awareness. DMV records also indicate an historic drop in 2009 of 16 and 17 year-olds seeking licenses. In an 11-year period from 1998 to 2008, an average of 41 percent of 16 year-olds obtained a drivers license; 62 percent of the age group had obtained a drivers license by the end of their 17th year. Using the anniversary date of the new teen driving laws, the percentage of 16 year-olds who obtained a license during the first year of the law dropped to 35.2 percent and a preliminary estimate for the second year shows 31 percent. That is, many teens are waiting until they are 17 or 18 to obtain their first license. Also as expected, DMV figures show an increase in the number of 18 year olds taking the licensing examinations. Researcher David Preusser, who reviewed the data, observed that the state is following nationwide trends.



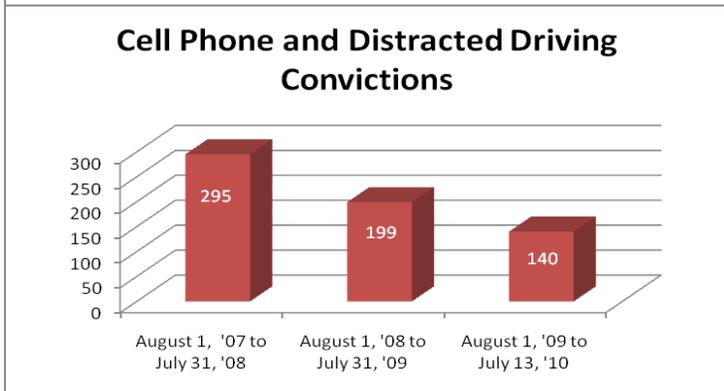
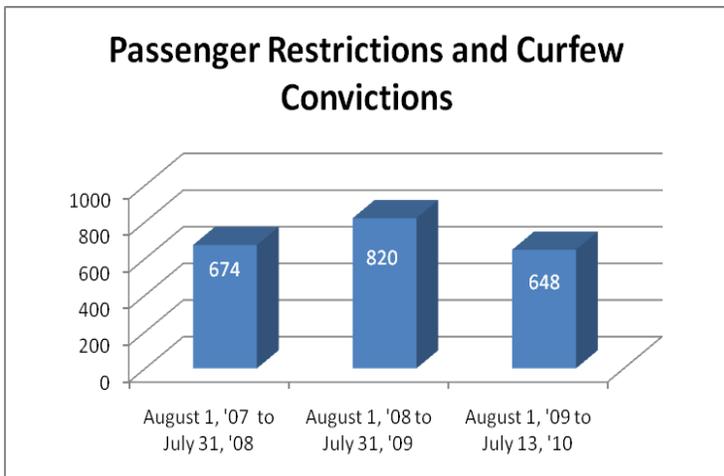
"Research conducted in other states has shown that GDL laws which strengthen learning and testing requirements and restrict high risk driving situations, such as during night hours and with passengers, are associated with a decrease in the teen licensure rate," Dr. Preusser said.



"However, it should also be noted that Connecticut and the entire country has seen difficult economic times. Driving is expensive and some families may have decided they cannot afford teen licensure until the economy improves. It is likely that some combination of increased requirements and the weak economy have both contributed to the substantial drop in the licensure rate," said Dr. Preusser, who has advocated delayed licensure as a strong safety remedy for teens.

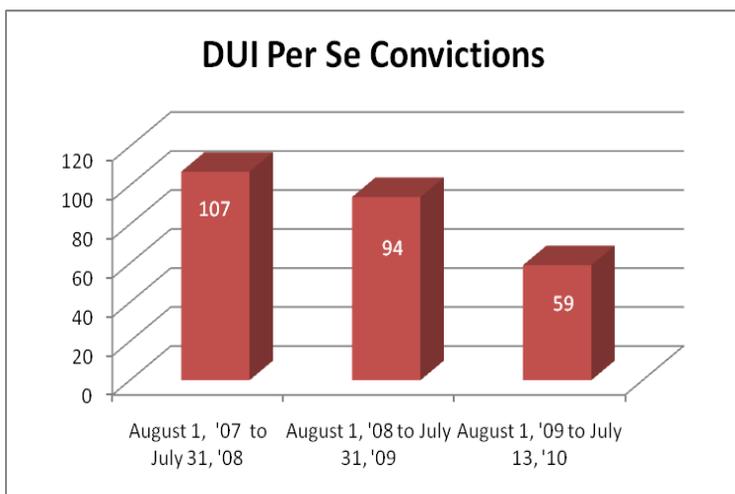
**Convictions Under Teen Driving Laws**

Another connected part of the trend and showing a positive effect of the new teen driving laws is a decrease in most convictions for violating these laws. License restrictions and strong penalties



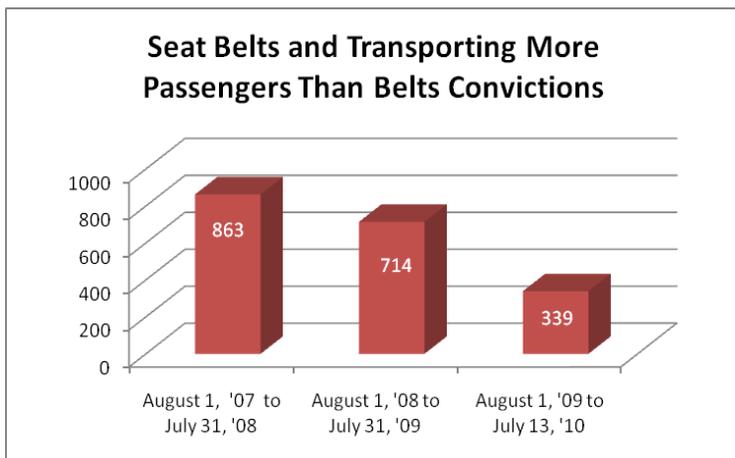
for violations figure prominently into deterring unsafe driving. A review was done of judicial convictions for the 2007 and 2008 periods on DMV records. It centered on those for violating restrictions as well as other laws, such as speeding and cell phone use, designed to protect drivers and passengers. In most instances the number of convictions a dropped. Further study is needed on whether the decreases relate to teens' and parents' attention to safety issues, uneven law enforcement or other issues. Convictions in key areas of speeding, cell phone use, failure to wear seat belts and driving under the influence all show decreases in last two years compared to the year before the new laws started. The only exception is an increase in combined convictions for violating both new passenger restriction and curfew laws in the first full year of the toughened law. These two are tempting to violate because teens want friends in their cars and drive at night, said teen drivers and parents during Task Force public hearings. Dr. Brendan Campbell, Chief of Pediatric Trauma at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and a former member of the Governor's Task Force, said he wasn't surprised at the increase.

"Many factors can lead to the increase of passenger restriction and curfew violations, including heightened enforcement right after the laws started and teens testing boundaries," he said, adding that it



will take a few years of data to have an accurate measure on the trend, but preliminary numbers for the second year of the tough laws show it as favorable.

Dr. Preusser noted that the statistics show a drop per licensed driver in teen violations for speeding, seat belts and cell phone/distracted driving. For example, the number of cell phone/distracted driving violations dropped from 10.1 per 1,000 of 16- and 17-year-old drivers to 7.8, a 29-percent decrease.



He said some of the drop in convictions is likely related to the driving restrictions in that fewer teens are driving late at night and fewer teens are driving with passengers thus there is less opportunity to violate and probably less driving given the weak economy.

In addition, the Governor's Task Force made Connecticut the only state in the nation to require a 48-hour suspension of a teen driver's license for certain violations, such

as passenger restrictions, curfew, speeding, reckless driving and driving under the influence. Nearly 1,000 such suspensions have occurred since August 1, 2008.

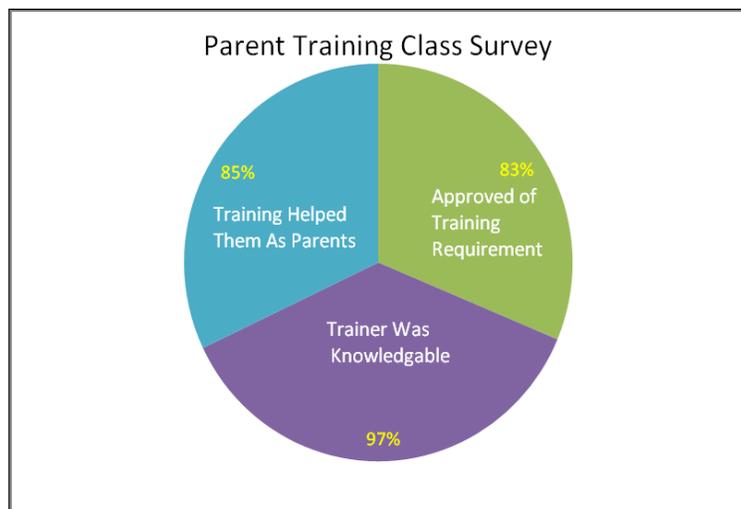
Statistics show, however, that since the seizure law went into effect two years ago, only about 60 of the state's 104 police departments have actually used it as of July 2010. Among these nearly 1,000 seizures of licenses reported, males topped the list at 673, females at 302; 324 were for drivers 16 years old and 651 were for drivers 17 years-old. Passenger restrictions (593), night curfew (272) and speeding over 20 mph (187) ranked as the top three violations for these seizures.

**Success of New Parent-Teen Training Requirement**

Coupled with restrictions and increased penalties for violations, were new training requirements. These also are seen as helping bring down crash and conviction numbers. Connecticut became the first state in the nation to require a mandatory two-hour joint safe-driving education program that a parent or guardian must attend with the young driver in training. DMV, with funding from

the state Department of Transportation, last year surveyed parents to gauge the program's effectiveness after a year of operation.

The results released in January 2010 showed that parents said it was overwhelmingly beneficial and has led them to adopt new safety measures with their young drivers. In the survey, 85 percent of parents reported that the training gave them more information to use in their parenting responsibilities with a teen driver. A large majority also said they would recommend these classes to parents of other teen drivers.



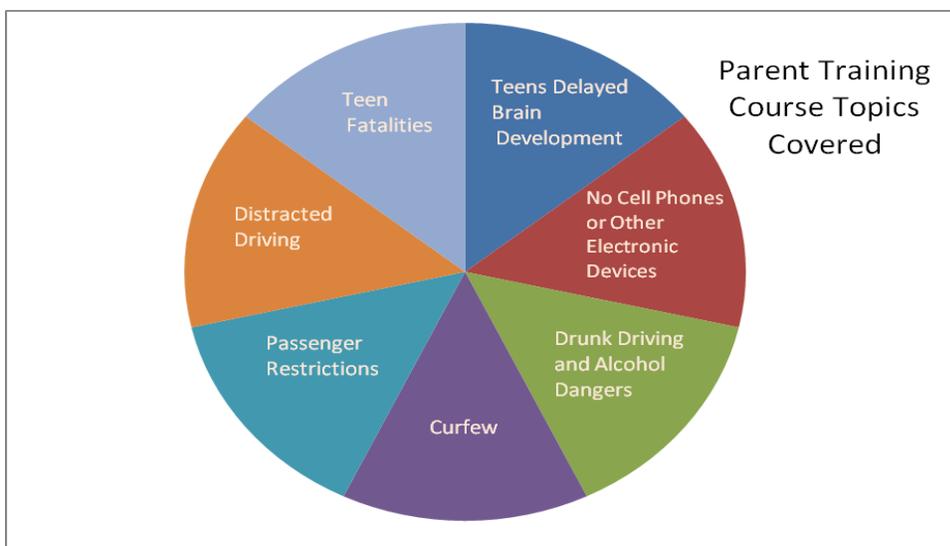
Almost half the parents also said that because of the training they were doing things with their young drivers they would not have done otherwise, such as enforcing the laws, reminding young drivers about the laws and dedicating more quality time for instruction. Almost all parents were satisfied that all relevant topics were covered during the course. The full report can be found at:

<http://www.ct.gov/dmv/parentsession>

All new drivers in Connecticut are required to take an eight-hour safe driving practices course, which

includes the parent-teen segment, at a driving school. The Department of Motor Vehicles provides driving schools with a general list of topics that must be covered in both the eight and its special two-hour parent-teen session.

New training standards also brought tougher tests that 16- or 17-year-old applicants must take both before obtaining a learner's permit and as part of the final licensing exam. The tests have 25 questions each



and applicants must get at least 20 questions correct each time. New permit holders must also now have at least 40 hours of behind-the-wheel training. The new battery of questions and bumped-up on-the-road training replaced a less rigorous approach.

### **Public Awareness Helping to Change Behavior**

More extensive training has brought increased safety messages for both parents and teens. These messages and other kinds of public awareness campaigns have contributed significantly to helping change behavior among parents and teens, said safety advocates and state officials. The overall effectiveness of these messages and other efforts will be measured as more data is developed as part of the evidence-based research programs run through DMV partnerships with Children's Medical Center in Hartford and Yale School of Medicine/Yale-New Haven Hospital in New Haven.

At the Department of Motor Vehicles, Governor Rell two years ago established a DMV Center for Teen Safe Driving. It tracks issues, organizes safety advocates, examines existing laws and policies and conducts educational programs related to 16- and 17-year-old drivers. It has a special web site – [www.ct.gov/teendriving](http://www.ct.gov/teendriving) – dedicated to promoting safe driving awareness. More than 300 teens participated in the 2010 DMV teen safe driving video contest, *From the Driver's Seat to the Director's Chair*, in its second year. Many teens reported that making the video, doing presentations in school, having discussions with friends and their talks at home with parents increased awareness of safety risks when driving. They reported that this understanding left them less likely to take risks, such as speeding or using a cell phone, because of both the penalties if caught and the dangers to themselves, families and friends. DMV also received two Public Relations Society of America Connecticut Chapter awards for educational projects designed to engage teens in safety behind the wheel. It also has a teen advisory council that provides comments, suggestions and critiques on ways to make communication with teens more effective.

The state Department of Transportation, where the Governor's Highway Safety Office is located, is a partner with DMV. It also does outreach programs to teen drivers and has funded different projects related to public awareness. It also was chosen this year by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as one of two national demonstration sites for piloting in 2010-2011 a distracted driving messaging campaign and it will also be examining teen-driving behavior in this context. It also is funding grants to combat underage drinking and driving.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Boston regional office, DMV's chief federal partner, has provided insight, national data, research information, technical support and a variety of other forms of assistance help to various state government agencies, policy, public health and safety advocates.

Below are examples of different partnerships with the DMV and focused on community-based public awareness projects and outreach efforts:

### **Public Health**

- The state Department of Public Health provides data and staff assistance to help advocates and policy makers review the most recent evidence-based data on crashes, injuries and deaths with the 16- and 17-year-old age group. It also assists in a variety of

public health-related projects undertaken by hospitals and public health officials around the state.

- Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford sponsors a number of awareness projects, including a simulator study in high schools to gauge teen driver behaviors under different computerized road conditions. This extensive study will measure the safety effects of combined simulator and parent or driving school training. Results will be compared to training done only by parents or a driving school. CCMC also sponsors *The Connecticut Teen Driving Safety Partnership*, which consists of representatives from government, medicine, local towns, public health, industry and safety advocate organizations to discuss monthly projects underway. CCMC does a variety of studies and conducts community outreach on teen driving safety issues. It also has a continuous education program for physicians statewide to remind them to have teen driving discussions during wellness exams with both adolescents and their parents.
- Yale School of Medicine and Yale New Haven-Hospital recently formed a partnership with the DMV. The new collaboration will focus on three areas: 1) traffic safety education and public awareness of teen traffic safety for teens, their parents, and health care providers in the Southern part of Connecticut; 2) traffic safety in diverse and vulnerable populations; and 3) community-based participatory injury prevention. Outreach efforts will include engaging high schools and doctors to participate in teen traffic safety awareness with teens and their families. Research studies on these traffic safety issues will also be part of the collaboration.

#### **Law Enforcement**

- The Connecticut State Police, The Connecticut Police Chiefs Association and the state Division of Criminal Justice all contributed in a number of ways to education of teens and parents through special programs and outreach in schools as resource officers. In the court system all GDL restriction violations are handled with due diligence by prosecutors with the goal to continue prosecuting all restrictions and to encourage strict speed enforcement for all operators.

#### **Business Community**

- Travelers Insurance, the primary prize sponsor in the DMV's second annual Teen Safe Driving video contest, contributed over \$50,000 toward promotion of the contest and prizes for student teams and their high schools, as well as sponsored a special event honoring the winners at the company's training facility in Windsor, Conn. in April of this year. Travelers, committed to promoting safe driving for drivers of all ages, has participated in and contributed to numerous safe driving initiatives in the past. Travelers also provided representation to the Governor's Safe Driving Task Force.
- Allstate insurance company was the first-year prize sponsor in the DMV teen safe driving video contest. It also provided educational materials to the Task Force and later DMV to distribute statewide when the laws first went into effect. In addition, the company has sponsored several events at which students were invited to participate in learning about distracted driving, speeding and the usefulness of a parent-teen safe driving contract. The company also had a representative on the Governor's Task Force.
- State Farm insurance company awarded DMV a \$9,000 grant in 2010 for outreach. Some funds were used to purchase a computer to produce safe-driving videos and other forms of messaging to teens, parents and communities.

### **Safety Advocates**

- IMPACT, an organization of parents, friends and relatives of teens killed in car accidents, makes more than 100 presentations a year to hundreds of high school students around the state. It has developed a teen driving safety program in which members share their experiences in a powerfully emotional and substantive presentation on teen audiences. They learn about the statistics, risk factors, what happens to the body in a crash, what states are doing to protect them and what they can do to protect themselves, their friends and their families from tragedy.
- Tim Hollister, a former task force member and father of a son who died in a car crash, created a national blog, [www.fromreidsdad.org](http://www.fromreidsdad.org), for parents of teen drivers. He helped organize a statewide conference in May 2010 to review Connecticut's 2008 teen driving laws and he received the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's National Public Service Award for his work.

### **Conclusion**

These kinds of public awareness issues, strong laws with definite penalties, increased training, parental involvement in understanding the dangers teen drivers face and the need for ongoing safety education are critical to keeping up momentum in making Connecticut's teen safe driving laws a success over time, said both Dr. Brendan Campbell and researcher David Preusser.

David Strickland, Administrator for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, put it bluntly in a June 2010 speech to teens on teen driving. "Today's discussion about Teen Driving Safety is, in truth, a discussion about making decisions and dealing, head on, with the consequences. Let me throw some words at you: jail, handcuffs, arrest, car crash, DUI, death, ambulance, emergency room, funerals. These are not just words. They describe the possible consequences of making a bad decision when you are behind the wheel."

He told parents that they set the example. "Your kids are watching you. When you are ready to turn over the keys to your young driver, make sure you have set standards for safe driving. And more importantly, you must make those standards stick."

He said that NHTSA focuses on a three-pronged approach to teen driving safety: 1) Reduce teen access to alcohol; 2) Promote seat belt use and 3) Support graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws.

Dr. Preusser and Dr. Campbell added that parents and guardians must remain vigilant about the consequences of unsafe driving. They must be open to the idea that their 16- or 17-year-old might not be ready or have the needed maturity to drive safely. Teenagers brains develop over time and the critical-decision skills are not fully developed until their early or mid-20s, said Dr. Campbell, a pediatrician.

In turn, this understanding can produce results like active parental involvement with deciding when a teen gets a license and the conditions when a teen can operate the vehicle. These can

lead to fewer citations, crashes, injuries or deaths among teens, and perhaps less risky behavior, both safety advocates said.

“After two years,” said DMV Commissioner Robert Ward, “the overall picture shows we made the right decisions in strengthening the laws. Our continued success rests with keeping the momentum going with teens, parents, safety advocates and as whole community concerned with this critical issue of saving lives.”

**Appendix**

**Chart and Table References**

Crashes of 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers At Fault pg. 3

Connecticut Accident Summary Table/Motor Vehicle Accident Data  
Connecticut Department of Transportation

16 Year-olds Obtaining Driver Licenses pg. 4

17 Year-olds Obtaining Driver Licenses pg. 4

Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles  
Licensing Data Information

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Driving Convictions pg. 6

DUI Per Se Convictions pg. 6

Seat Belts and Transporting More Passengers Than Belts Convictions pg. 6

Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles Driver Records of Convictions Transmitted by  
Judicial Department

Parent Training Class Survey pg. 7

2009 Survey By Preusser Research Group, Inc. of Parents Who Attended Required Two-Hour  
Course for Licensing of a 16- or 17-Year-Old Driver

Parent Training Course Topics Covered pg. 7

Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicle Curriculum for Driving Schools

**Changes in Convictions Per 1,000 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers**

	<b>Aug '07</b>	<b>rate/ 1K lic</b>	<b>Aug '08</b>	<b>rate/ 1K lic</b>
	<b>Jul '08</b>		<b>Jul'09</b>	
Pass/Curfew	675	23.2	820	32.2
Cell Phone and Distracted Driving	295	10.1	199	7.8
Driving Under Influence Per Se	107	3.7	94	3.7
Speeding	2781	95.5	2020	79.3
Seat Belts	862	29.6	704	27.6

Source: Preusser Research Group Inc.