

OTHER

HOW THE DMV WORKS WITH OLDER DRIVERS

BILL: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Bill Seymour, Infocast Editor.

I have with me today **Marilyn Lukie**, Division Chief of the Medical Review Unit at the Department of Motor Vehicles. This unit examines qualifications for holding driver's licenses. Today, Marilyn and I are going to talk about older drivers and holding a driver's license.

BILL SEYMOUR: Marilyn, what is the DMV's view on older drivers? Many are afraid of calling the DMV with questions.

MARILYN LUKIE: Actually, they shouldn't be afraid of calling the Department because we are able to answer an individual's questions on what the qualifications are. If a person has a medical condition and they have uncertainties, then they can request a voluntary retest, file medical reports. Medical reports are favorable. We schedule them for a retest, they pass the retest, this gives them the confidence. They know that going through this process they're qualified to drive.

In some instances a person may not meet the full qualifications, which means they may not be able to drive at night or on limited access highways, but they still have their operator's license, and they still can go to the doctor's, to the post offices, to the senior centers and carry on their life and daily tasks with dignity and have this mobility available.

BILL: That's important to the DMV, is it not, to help older drivers retain their licenses for as long as possible?

MARILYN: Absolutely.

BILL: Now, are all older drivers in the State of Connecticut screened?

MARILYN: No. Only those who are reported to us officially by either a law enforcement officer, a medical doctor, or an optometrist, or by notarized affidavit from a third party.

BILL: So that's how an older driver might find him or herself under a review at the DMV.

MARILYN: Yes.

BILL: It just doesn't happen automatically --

MARILYN: No.

BILL: -- because you reach a certain age.

MARILYN: No.

BILL: What does the DMV do in circumstances when someone does find themselves under review at the DMV to help ease their apprehensions? What does the DMV do to help ease those apprehensions?

MARILYN: The way the law is, we have to notify them by mail. Once they call us, then we explain the process and tell them, file the medical reports if the medical reports are favorable, we'll schedule you for a retest. If you pass the retest, you're back on the road again.

BILL: So the help to them comes right after we notify them?

MARILYN: Yes. Or a person whose doctor may have told them that they're sending us a letter or the police confiscated their license and told them to contact us, and they call us, then we will explain to them the process, and that does put them at ease. They sort of understand that this may not be a permanent situation, it may be just a lull in a period of when they're unable to drive until we can follow through with their case and determine that they're qualified medically and they can drive a vehicle in today's traffic environment.

BILL: What are the basics, in other words? What do we do? What's the steps we follow when there is some evidence of a problem that occurs either as a result of doctor's reports to us or an on-the-road skills test that we give them ourselves? What are some of the steps that we take to see that, if possible, they can continue to hold the license?

MARILYN: In some instances, there may be conflicting views from medical doctors, from treating physicians if a person has more than one medical condition. If the medical information is questionable, we will refer the medical information to our medical advisory board in those specialties. The board members are volunteers. They will give us their professional recommendations. We review the file when we get their response, and then make a decision.

It may be questionable whether a person can drive fully or may be only able to drive on nonlimited access highways and at daytime hours only. We will schedule them for an appropriate level of retest. We have the general retest. We have the limited license retest. And for a person who has special needs, and needs special equipment, we do have the handicapped driver training program, which is the only state-funded program throughout the nation and has been in effect since World War II.

BILL: So we have a number of different steps --

MARILYN: Oh, definitely.

BILL: -- that we take.

MARILYN: Definitely. And as a prerequisite for either obtaining a license or retaining a license, a person may be on what we call medical reporting, be required to file medical reports at specific intervals, which could be for a number of years or which could be for as long as they hold the license if the person may have a progressive disease. And at all those times that the medical reports come in from their treating physicians that are favorable, they're allowed to retain their license. If their condition changes and goes down, then there may be a problem.

BILL: Where we would just review it again.

MARILYN: Yes.

BILL: And go over it again with them again.

MARILYN: Yes.

BILL: Our concern is both the safety of the driver --

MARILYN: Yes.

BILL: -- as well as the other drivers on the road.

MARILYN: Yes.

BILL: I see. Now, how about cars? Do we do any, shall we say, do we place any restrictions on licenses telling them that they need to have certain kinds of equipment or certain kinds of mirrors on cars or other kinds of items that would assist with the driving?

MARILYN: If a person has a hearing impairment, they may have a limitation on their licenses, hearing aid required, and have mirrors installed where they see at least 200 feet to the rear. A person with special needs, a physical impairment, may have mechanical equipment designation on their driver's license. They will receive a prescription from the handicapped driving training person who trains them. They're motor vehicle inspectors as well as certified driving instructors, and that equipment they must have installed on their vehicle.

BILL: Now, do we do any kind of outreach to organizations representing elderly or older folks in our society like AARP or senior citizen centers, etc., so that we explain what our processes are and what happens?

MARILYN: If we get a request from an organization we do honor the request. We have in the past. I have in the past gone out and spoken to caregivers, conservators, counselors, senior citizens, AARP, to answer the question, a senior citizen symposium in one of the big cities where it was an all-around affair, not just driving. It was everything involved. And anytime anyone wants us, we do our very best to make sure that we can meet their requests because it is very important to them and it is very important to us too to get across that we're here to help. We're not here to take the license away actually. We're here to try to help a person keep their license for as long as they can, even though it may be on a limited basis.

BILL: Okay. And when we do have to take a license away, how do we approach someone regarding that? What's the way that we do that?

MARILYN: We have to notify them by mail, certified mail. And at any time during the medical review, they are permitted to request an administrative hearing. Once any action has

occurred, but if we merely do a medical review because we have a letter from a third party and we're requesting medical reports, the person is not, at that occasion, entitled to a hearing because the Commission of Motor Vehicles has the authority to request medical reports. If the person fails to file the report, then we would suspend for failure to comply. We have initiated suspension actions. So then they would be eligible for a hearing if they disagreed with the action and to present their case.

BILL: And to present their case.

MARILYN: Yeah.

BILL: Now, prior to, you know, any sort of reporting to us, people may want to have their driving skills either checked out or brushed up by taking some extra training. Are there driving programs where people can do this?

MARILYN: If they wish, and we sometimes to recommend that a person engage at their expense in commercial driver's school to give them a refresher driver training course because you know, over the years, people have developed bad habits.

BILL: Sure.

MARILYN: And with the drastic change in signage as opposed to 50 years ago or more when somebody got their license --

BILL: Sure.

MARILYN: It's like two different animals, even the markings on the highways. So -- and it has been beneficial. It has been beneficial to people.

BILL: So you have seen that in your own involvement with people.

MARILYN: Oh definitely. Definitely.

BILL: Great. Well, Marilyn, thank you for spending a few minutes with us today talking about how the DMV wants to help elderly drivers and older citizens in our state retain their driver's license.

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