

TEENAGE DRIVING SAFETY
PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE CONNECTICUT
TEEN DRIVER SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Ernie Bertothy, Infocast Editor.

On September 24, 2007, a new teen driving safety partnership was officially formed. The DMV, along with parents whose teenage children have died in auto accidents and medical professionals have joined together to enlist pediatricians and family physicians around Connecticut in the unique accident prevention education program for teens and their parents.

The name of this coalition is the Connecticut Teen Driver Safety Partnership. The following is a recording of the press conference that was held on September 24, 2007 at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, Connecticut to announce this new partnership and its new program.

DR. LEONARD BANCO: Well, good morning everyone. My name is Dr. Leonard Banco, and I'm the Vice President for Regional Development at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. And I'm really pleased to welcome everyone here this morning for the official announcement for the Connecticut Teen Driving Safety Partnership.

For fifteen years now, the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center has worked to reduce injuries and deaths of children as a result of injuries and accidents, and for five years now, we have been partners with the Injury-Free Coalition for Children based in New York to

work with respect to unintentional injuries. Today we're going to be announcing a new initiative around teen drivers, which is going to be based upon a partnership, both within the State of Connecticut, and between Injury-Free Coalition and the Allstate Foundation. This is an attempt to integrate primary care and advice about teen driving with the routine care that we give to teens in primary care pediatric, in primary care family practices around the state.

And I would like to first introduce Brendan Campbell, who's going to tell us a little bit more about the project specifically. Brendan.

BRENDAN CAMPBELL: Thanks, Len. Good morning. This is an exciting and important project for Connecticut Children's Medical Center and our trauma program because it demonstrates the level of commitment that we have for caring for injured children in the State of Connecticut.

The focus of this project is prevention, and more specifically increasing awareness of the very real risks that automobiles pose to teenage drivers. We believe that implementing simple interventions may reduce these risks in significant ways. Prevention is vitally important because once teenagers are involved in car crashes and sustain serious injuries, our role as pediatric trauma surgeons becomes one of damage control. It is our hope that this initiative will prevent injuries to Connecticut teenage drivers because the effect these injuries have on both Connecticut teenagers and their families is profound.

You need only tour the inpatient wards of this hospital to see this first hand. I would like to take a brief moment to just describe to you the magnitude of this problem. Even though 16 and 17-year-olds make up only 2% of Connecticut's driving population, they account for greater than 12% of

the injuries that are sustained on Connecticut's roads. The national numbers are even more staggering. Annually 6,000 teens were killed and more than 300,000 are injured in motor vehicles on American roads.

Our previous work has shown that pediatricians and family physicians are willing to change office practices and to promote community education and health policy initiatives. The Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Connecticut Academy of Family Physicians have a successful history of implementing innovative office-based healthcare programs for individuals and families. What we hope to accomplish with this initiative is to reduce automobile-related injuries and deaths by having Connecticut physicians engage in blunt conversations with their teenage patients about the risk that they often take while operating motor vehicles.

Our program, which is called the Connecticut Teen Driver Safety Partnership, will be sending out surveys this week to physicians in Connecticut to inquire about the educational methods they currently employ. Later this fall, we'll be sending out materials for doctors to hand out to their teenage patients during office visits. Based on the survey's results, other forms of education and interventional activities will be designed and implemented. We hope it will become a model for programs to be used in other states as well.

I would be remiss if I did not mention Gary Lapidus and Kevin Borrup from the injury prevention center here at Connecticut Children's Medical Center for the hard work and creativity that they've invested in this project.

This morning you will hear from other individuals and organizations who have helped make the Connecticut Teen Driver Safety Partnership

possible. We are grateful for their ongoing contributions to this important initiative.

Now, I would like to introduce to you the Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles, Robert Ward.

ROBERT WARD: Thank you, Dr. Campbell, and good morning. As Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles, I can tell you that it's an honor for our agency to be involved in such a proactive, focused, and worthwhile endeavor. As you know, the Department of Motor Vehicles is charged with licensing teenage drivers. What you may not realize is how seriously we take the responsibility of trying to prevent accidents when those drivers are licensed. We are well aware of the statistics. It's frankly one of those things that frightens me a little as I go to work each morning, that we have that responsibility of licensing those drivers, and we know that we need to do more to educate the teen drivers and their parents. And it was really a good confluence of ideas when we had a teen meeting at DMV to talk about how we could get the message out more that we heard from the IMPACT parents and learn of a coalition being put together to focus on just that issue, and so we are proud to be a part of this.

A partnership of 1,300 physicians statewide to educate teens and parents about safe driving can have a lasting impact. Clearly pediatricians and other physicians of young people with their parents have a special impact. A word from a physician, we think, can make all the difference in the world about adopting safe driving habits and understanding the laws of restrictions.

The other thing that's important to point out today, most of the people in the room don't know we have a restricted graduated driver's license. There are restrictions when the driver is first licensed as to having passengers, for

example, in the car with them. What many don't realize is that beginning October 1 there are new restrictions for the learner's permit that those same restrictions that when a parent is teaching a child to drive, there can be no other passengers in the car except another parent because we want at the very beginning, the legislature made the decision they need to learn about the graduated license even during the training. And the driver training needs to be focused on the child and the driver and the message today is for those parents. There are not to be distractions when you are teaching your child to drive. It's not just a time to go to pick up something at the grocery store. It's teaching a child safe driving habits from day one.

What we believe this partnership here today will do is allow that message to be delivered in a timely way and really in a very important way in a doctor's office. We also were pleased to be able to work with the !MPACT parents. If there's any message that parents of teenagers would want to hear, it's from those who have lost a child to a teenage driving accident. We were able to interview them, several of the parents, at DMV. So on the podcast now, we ask all parents to listen to that, to take their sobering advice that you can save your child's life. It seems like it would be some other child, but all of us with young drivers are exposed to these problems.

With this partnership here today, we believe that a lot can be done. We'd like to thank the Allstate Foundation for their funding and for all of the partners here today, the physicians, the pediatricians, the !MPACT parents, the Coalition for Safe Teen Driving, for working here together today for safety. Thank you very much.

DR. LEONARD BANCO: Before we go on, I just wanted to mention that this kind of a huge collaborative effort and the 15 years that we spent around injury

prevention could not be possible without strong support from leadership from Connecticut Children's Medical Center. And both Marty Gavin, our CEO, and Wendy Waring, our COO, are here today, and I just wanted to acknowledge their strong support for this project.

At this point in time, Robert Galvin, the Commissioner of Public Health, was supposed to speak, but ironically, he is ill and unfortunately he wasn't able to make it. But I know that the Department of Public Health is a strong supporter of this effort. We have worked very, very closely with them to this point, and I know that we will be working very closely with this project and others like it go on.

I would next like to introduce Dr. Rob Zobaski, who is the immediate past president of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

DR. ROB ZOBASKI: Thank you, Len. Connecticut's pediatricians have been working on the problem of teens and driving for many, many years. It has been our main emphasis to get some of the new laws passed in Connecticut to protect teen drivers and those of us who share the road with them for the last ten years.

Dr. Campbell before mentioned some startling statistics. The one that stuck in my mind when I was doing the surchair many years ago was that each year 1 in 9 16-year-old drivers is responsible for a car crash when there's either a loss of life, significant injury or significant property damage. That's a huge number. But I think the context that we ought to offer is to think back, and each one of us should think back to our high school yearbooks. As Dr. Banco mentioned in some of his testimony, many years ago all of us

remember the last page of our high school year book, which said “In Memoriam.”

My high school yearbook, it was in memoriam of someone who had died from leukemia, and three people, including a very close friend of mine, who died in a car crash. Dr. Banco’s memory was the same, and Dr. Banco’s daughter’s experience was the same. My daughter just graduated from high school, and I’m proud to say, there was one person who had lost their life, but due to a chronic genetic disease, so we have made headway. But if one child dies in Connecticut this year due to a car crash that should have been prevented, that’s one too many.

That’s why this work is so important. It’s a collaboration between many groups and many physicians and we hope someday we’ll be a national model.

I applaud the Injury Prevention Center, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center and Allstate for this incredibly important program. And I pledge to do so in my practice to follow along as all pediatricians do in this state. Thank you.

DR. LEONARD BANCO: You know, many times in injury control work, we focus on collecting data. We get the numbers, we talk about fatality rates and injury rates, and you’ve heard some of those today. But it’s very clear to me and others who participate in this particular part of our work that what makes this real, and what quite honestly brings people along to want to do something about this is the terrible tragedies and the story people tell about those tragedies. And the IMPACT parents are the ones who clearly have not only suffered the tragedy from this problem, but have done something about it by telling the stories. And for that group this morning, I would like to introduce Connie Jascowski, who’s going to bring her group forward with her remarks.

CONNIE JASCOWSKI: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. First, I would like to say what an honor it is for !IMPACT to have been selected as a participant in the Connecticut Teen Driving Safety Partnership. It's such an important endeavor. Thank you in particular to Gary Lapidus for thinking of us. We look forward to working alongside everyone involved in an effort to help keep our teens safe.

Mourning Parents Act, or !IMPACT, is a non-profit organization whose mission is to eliminate tragedies caused by inexperienced drivers through awareness, education and legislation. All of the organization speakers have lost teen sons due to automobile accidents. None of these accidents were related. They were all in December of 2002, all within an 11-day period of each other, and all within a 25-mile radius of each other.

Since our incorporation in January of 2004, we have spoken at numerous high schools, driving schools, PTOs, conferences and organizations including the Kiwanis and Rotary. We volunteer our time and have traveled across Connecticut and beyond speaking to these groups, sharing our stories, talking to them about teenage safe driving awareness, deadly distractions, making good decisions, and the teenage graduated driver's license in law.

In a little over three and a half years, we have reached an estimated 30,000 teens and parents. Most recently we presented at Newington High School. Participants of the mock crash and members of the SADD group are here with us today. They're right back there. With the efforts of Nancy Russo, she is now head of their organization, SADD organization. We are so proud to have them joining with us.

Every year in December we have a Teenage Safe Driving Awareness Week. Many schools across the state participate in this educational program. We have been fortunate to have the support of Governor Rell, who has signed our proclamation for this week every year. !MPACT does not charge for these presentations. We feel it is much too important a message to not have a school see our presentation due to money. To find out more about !MPACT, that's exclamation point, capital M, capital P, capital A, capital C, capital T. Our website is www.mourningparents@act.org. We ask that you visit that site. If you would like further information about !MPACT, you can contact any of the mothers on the website, including myself, Connie Jascowski, that's J-A-S-C-O-W-S-K-I, in care of !MPACT, P.O. Box 310942, Newington, Connecticut 06111-0942, or by phone at 860-666-5639.

At this time, I would like to, it's my pleasure, actually, to introduce my partners and co-founders and fellow speakers, Sherry Chapman and Janice Palmer. We are the mothers of !MPACT. Thank you.

Now, it is also my pleasure and honor to ask Senator Paul Doyle and State Rep, Tony Garrera, co-chairmen of the Transportation Committee, to please join me. They have had a very special interest in this as they found out about it.

REPRESENTATIVE GARRERA: Well, good morning everyone, and thank you for having me here this morning. Just a brief comment, as the co-chairmen of the Transportation Committee, obviously we have passed legislation to help improve what's out there on our roadway. And it's all about safety ladies, and gentlemen. Our kids out there have to have the proper techniques and so forth when it comes to driving. That's why we passed graduated driver's license restrictions in regard to those licensing. And as a legislator, my

partner here, Senator Doyle, will keep doing that because it is all about safety and protecting our children. I mean, I have teens out there, in fact, I threaten them once in a while that I may be passing laws to make it 18 rather than 16, and they tend to do a lot more work around the house when I say that. But it's about the safety of the kids, as we all know. That is why this organization has done such a great job, Connie, and everyone in her organization. And we will make sure, as legislatures, that we do our part to protect our children of this great state. So thank you.

SENATOR DOYLE: I just want to thank Connie and the other mothers for their leadership on this important issue. It's an example of where individuals' lives were severely and almost ruined because of the loss of their children. They've turned and made a positive thing out of it, trying to move forward and trying to prevent such other fatalities. And through their efforts, I'm hoping, and the efforts of the coalition today, and the efforts of the Connecticut Children's Hospital that we can save -- just minimize the damage to other children. How many that we don't know about? But the bottom line is, it's very important to get the message out to our teens that they have to be safe so we can't have other families destroyed because of the loss of youth and innocence.

So again, I thank you for coming today. And I look forward to working with the coalition, working with Representative Garrera to get further legislation passed over the next several years to try to prevent such senseless carnage. Thank you very much.

REPRESENTATIVE GARRERA: Ladies and gentlemen there are times when we try to pass legislation, there's always, obviously, arguments to both sides of the issue. But let me tell you that the laws that we have just passed, and Connie

knows, it does save lives, and you can see the numbers and the percentages of how much these accidents have decreased. And if we can save one life, when it comes to legislation, by all means, we should be doing it. So thank you.

DR. LEONARD BARCO: Well, in one sense, the reason we're all here today is because of the next speaker. The Allstate Foundation had the insight and forethought to float the opportunity for some grants to be able to actually do this project, and we were the fortunate recipient of one of those two grants. The other is going to Little Rock, Arkansas, actually. So I would like to introduce Stephanie Demcheksqual (phonetic) to bring us remarks from the Allstate Foundation.

STEPHANIE DEMCHEKSQUAL: As Dr. Campbell mentioned, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause among American teenagers, killing between 5,000 and 6,000 teenagers every year. This is the reason we are all here today.

On behalf of the Allstate Foundation, I would like to welcome everyone here today for the important cause of teen safe driving. I would also like to thank the Injury-Free Coalition for Kids and Connecticut Children's Medical Center for the opportunity to partner with them on such a wonderful opportunity here in Hartford.

Throughout Allstate's 76 year history our commitment to the community has been part of the fabric of our company. Keeping that in mind, the Allstate Foundation has been very active in the State of Connecticut. Like this teen safe driving project, we've also partnered with local YMCAs and Habitat for Humanities here in the Hartford area to help create safe and vital communities.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the representatives here today from the Injury-Free Coalition for Kids, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, American Academy of Pediatrics, Connecticut Academy of Family Physicians, Mourning Parents Act, and the Department of Motor Vehicles for joining together on the effort to save 6,000. Thank you.

DR. LEONARD BANCO: Well, there's a proverb, or at least a saying that says, "Success has a thousand fathers." In this particular case I would add mothers. I think that if we look at the group of people who have assembled here today for the start to this exciting project, we're absolutely assured of success. And I think all that we have to do is to fulfill our individual roles, and I think success is surely going to be at hand. We will save more than one life. We will save many lives if we get all the pediatricians and family practitioners to incorporate counseling about this issue into their routine medical care.

So I want to thank all of you for coming, and I'm sure that individuals will be happy to stay around for further interviews and discussion. Thank you very much.

ERNIE BERTOTHY: This has been an Infocast produced by the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Thank you for listening.