

OPINION: Massachusetts needs this law to get habitual traffic offenders off the roads before they kill


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You get drunk in Massachusetts, get behind the wheel of a car and kill someone. You will be subject to criminal action, but the longest the Registry of Motor Vehicles can revoke your license is four years.

You would have to do the same thing a second time before the registry could suspend your license for life.

That's absurd, and it is time the Legislature did something about it.

A 17-year-old from Taunton, Nicholas Silva-Thomas, was killed this month when he was hit by a car police say was driven by someone who should not

have been on the road. Silva-Thomas was skate boarding. He would have been a senior at Taunton High School this fall and a member of the wrestling team. Those things aren't going to happen because Paul Baran was still on the road.

Baran had been arrested twice for drunken driving, six times for speeding, has been in nine serious accidents and convicted of refusing to obey police.

He has had an astounding 16 license suspensions. Baran, 55, of Taunton, is now being held on \$100,000 bail for leaving the scene of an accident causing death.

He should never have been on the road.

Republicans on Beacon Hill have introduced legislation that would establish different levels of habitual traffic offender and make it possible for the Registry of Motor Vehicles to revoke the driving privilege of repeat offenders for periods longer than the four years now allowed by law, and revoke forever the license of true highway menaces. Sen. Robert Hedlund, R-Weymouth, and state Rep. Geoff Diehl, R-Whitman, were co-sponsors of the bill.

Democrats should not ignore this proposal just because it comes from Republicans who make up small minorities in the House and Senate. Democratic Sen. Marc Pacheco of Taunton said he received many constituent calls about the issue and worked with Republicans in shaping language in the bill. We applaud him for not being locked into party politics to the detriment of public good.

This newspaper long has supported tougher penalties for repeat drunken drivers, and has no problem extending its support to this bill to control all drivers who are a menace on the road.


We have sent emails to all state senators and representatives from this region asking them to tell us whether or not they will vote for the bill, and we will carry a story telling you what they say in response.

We invite you, too, to express your views of the proposal, which is detailed below.

This is a good step to making our roads safer by removing drivers who have no concern about the safety and well being of other drivers and pedestrians.

What the law would do

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- Increase the minimum period for license revocation for a first-time habitual traffic offender from 4 to 5 years;
- Create a Level 2 habitual traffic offender classification for individuals who have already had their license revoked for being a habitual offender, making them subject to a second revocation from 5 to 15 years;
- Create a Level 3 habitual traffic offender classification that provides a potential lifetime ban for offenses by more serious repeat offenders who have had previous suspensions; and
- Provide the registrar of motor vehicles the authority to attach terms and conditions as the registrar deems necessary if and when returning a license to any level habitual traffic offender.

Current law defines an habitual traffic offender as someone who has been convicted of three enumerated offenses (including driving while intoxicated, reckless driving, making a false statement in an application for a driver's license or learner's permit, leaving the scene of an accident, operating a motor vehicle with a suspended license, driving without a license and the use of a vehicle while committing a felony) and/or has committed 12 other general traffic offenses carrying a license suspension of 30 days or more. The proposed legislation would create a tiered system of suspensions for habitual traffic offenders by adding to the existing habitual offender law two new categories, Level 2 and Level 3, with progressively increasing periods of license revocation.

Specifically, the bill would:



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Rokkon 3 hours ago Report Abuse

How about illegal immigrants who drive on the roads? Do you have an editorial for that too?

Now, the issue at hand. Do you think having a license or not having one will stop a drunk from driving? License revocation is a nice little pink bow on the problem but it does nothing! Kids are not allowed to buy tobacco or alcohol until they are 18 & 21 respectively but does that stop them from getting it? You need to start jailing them and make it a very unpleasant experience or at the very least boot their car.

Look how effective license revocation is:

http://www.patriotledger.com/news/cops_and_courts/x1510862683/Hingham-police-Three-time-drunken-driver-caught-behind-the-wheel-again

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Nha Trang 2 hours ago Report Abuse

And 'OMG the ILLEGALZ!!!!' is at it again. Jeez, if there were a hundred thousand illegals in Massachusetts - and that'd be a crazy high number - the rest of us would outnumber them SIXTY TO ONE. Get a clue, huh? Not everything's about 'OMG the ILLEGALZ!!!' okay?

But yeah, this is a stupid law. PL editors, listen up: punk losers like Paul Baran are NEVER, EVER going to stop driving and they're NEVER, EVER going to stop drinking. It's sad, because Quincy was a pioneer 30 years back in stopping coddling these maggots and putting them in prison where they belong, but that was then, and we're back to the coddling.

The knuckledraggers scream about putting criminals behind bars, but a guy selling a bag of dope in Dorchester doesn't do me any harm. Having the Barans on the road is a menace to everyone. It's plain that he's a danger to society and he always will be, so he needs to be locked up for life. Period.

And do that to enough of these drunken weasels, and maybe something will change. We can always hope.

TruePatriot 1 hour ago Report Abuse

I can tell you that there are a whole lot more of 'legal Americans' driving around drunk killing innocents than illegals. I'm not protecting illegals; they are breaking the law by being here illegally. But; its just not fare play for the media to hype an illegal caught driving DUI for days when there are probably a hundred non-illegals caught driving DUI and not run through the media.

Drunken driving is drunken driving - it just needs to be crushed out with heavier punishment than what is being done today. Put them on the side of the road in a striped MDOC uniform with a big sign saying I was once drunk and now picking up trash along the highway. For lunch I get peanut butter on white bread with a tin cup of water.....

jzsmith1965 1 hour ago Report Abuse

any laws passed will be ignored by habitual violaters the laws do not work as is more laws will not help when I was a kid registry cops would confiscate plates and notify the driver why plate was taken and laws were actually enforced

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