

State lawmakers seek crackdown on dangerous drivers after Taunton fatal

Taunton fatal spurs crackdown on repeat traffic offenders

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Mike Gay/gatehouse news service

Taunton police accident reconstruction officer Carlos Silva examines the scene of the fatal accident on Bay Street. The car belongs to a second driver who swerved to avoid the teen lying in the road and struck a curb.

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TAUNTON — State lawmakers want to stiffen the penalties on repeat traffic offenders after a hit-and-run crash claimed a Taunton teenager's life this month.

State Rep. Geoffrey Diehl, R-Whitman, is among the co-sponsors of a bill that calls for longer suspensions for repeat offenders, including a lifetime license revocation for the worst violators.

The proposal specifically aims to increase the minimum period for license revocation for a first-time habitual traffic offender from four to five years while adding two new levels in the offender law to create more progressive punishments.

"Drivers who repeatedly violate the law after having their license revoked are not only abusing the system, they present in many cases a serious threat to public safety," Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, said in a press release.

The proposal stems from the Aug. 4 accident that killed 17-year-old Nicholas Silva-Thomas in Taunton and allegedly involved a driver whose license had been suspended or revoked 16 times in the past 22 years.

Paul Baran, of Taunton, pleaded not guilty last week to charges of leaving the scene of an accident resulting in death and was ordered held on \$100,000 bail. That amount was upheld by Judge Paul McCallum on Tuesday after Baran sought a bail review in Taunton District Court.

Police say Baran struck and killed Silva-Thomas near Watson Pond State Park while the teenager was riding his skateboard on Bay Street.

At Baran's initial arraignment on Aug. 8, a prosecutor called Baran's rap sheet "one of the worst I've seen," citing a three-page list that dated back 17 years and included two arrests on charges of driving under the influence, six charges of speeding and two charges of leaving the scene of an accident resulting in property damage.

Under current state law, a person can receive a lifetime ban on their license only if convicted of motor-vehicle homicide; a conviction of drunken driving

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homicide with a prior OUI conviction; a fifth OUI conviction; or refusing to take a blood-alcohol test after three OUI convictions.

It also classifies a habitual traffic offender as someone convicted of three enumerated offenses, including driving while intoxicated and reckless driving, and/or has committed 12 other general traffic offenses carrying a license suspension of 30 days or more.

The bill filed Tuesday would create two more levels of punishment to create a tiered system of suspensions for habitual traffic offenders:

Under the new level 2 category, offenders who already had their license revoked would be subject to a second suspension of five to 15 years.

Under a level 3 category, they could face a lifetime suspension.

"We have a responsibility as licensed drivers to share our roadways in a safe manner," said Diehl, who also represents Abington and East Bridgewater.

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