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# Young N.J. drivers to sport decals on vehicles

By Aaron Morrison

Associated Press

TRENTON - Young drivers soon will be easier for police to spot in New Jersey.

The state Motor Vehicle Commission yesterday introduced red decals that some motorists younger than 21 must display on their license plates, making New Jersey the first state to alert police when a new driver is behind the wheel.

Young drivers have balked at the requirement since then-Gov. Jon S. Corzine signed the law last year, complaining that police might target them.

State law enforcement and motor-vehicle officials said yesterday that the measure, named Kyleigh's Law after a teen killed in an accident, would make teen-driving restrictions easier to enforce.

"The new decal will strengthen police officers' ability to enforce the Graduated Driver License law requirement," Attorney General Paul Dow said in a statement, released after the decal ceremony at a motor-vehicle office in Freehold.

The law was named for Kyleigh D'Alessio, a 16-year-old central New Jersey high school student killed in 2006 while riding in a vehicle driven by another teen.

The removable, reflective red decal, which will cost \$4, will help police identify provisionally licensed drivers in order to enforce restrictions on passenger limits and 11 p.m. curfews.

Drivers who have completed the 12-month provisional-license period will not have to display the decal even if younger than 21. Regardless, some teens still have reservations about the enforcement of the law.

Christina Lombardo, 18, of Old Bridge, is the chapter vice president of Students Against Destructive Decisions at Old Bridge High School. She said she generally supported any effort to make teens safer, but felt the law created an unwarranted prejudice.

"It's already scary being a new driver, but to know that you have a scarlet letter on your car can make you even more nervous," she said.

Division of Highway Traffic Safety director Pam Fischer said, "Right now, the police have to make an assumption about who holds a provisional license. This is taking the guessing game out of it."

Fischer said her department was finishing an instructional video that would help officers enforce the new law, which will take effect May 1, the start of National Youth Traffic Safety Month.

The Motor Vehicle Commission estimates it will sell 500,000 pairs of the decals during the first year the new law is in effect.

New Jersey officials said 36 teen drivers and eight teen passengers were killed last year in traffic crashes. Teenagers are the largest category of drivers involved in crashes in the state, even though they account for only 6 percent of licensed drivers, according to the Division of Highway Traffic Safety.

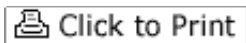
Nationally, nearly 3,500 victims ages 15 to 19 were killed in crashes in 2008, and more than 350,000 were treated for injuries suffered in crashes, according the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This month, a New Jersey judge dismissed a lawsuit brought by a lawyer who, on behalf of his teenage son and nephew, contended that police would identify and victimize teens under the new law.

The judge ruled that "operating a motor vehicle is not a right. It's a privilege subject to state regulations."

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