



Driving on the Right Side of the Road

Introduction to the Legislative Process

Learning About the Texas Legislative Process Through Bills Related to Traffic Safety

Driving on the Right Side of the Road (DRSR) has developed a wide variety of materials through collaboration with experienced, certified teachers to help teach students in grades K-12 about traffic safety. The traffic safety content is presented in conjunction with social studies, language arts, and even math curriculums.

In this activity, best suited for a social studies or government class, students will learn about the legislative process in Texas through bills related to traffic safety. Inside this brochure are summaries of 10 traffic safety-related bills that were filed during the 2013 legislative session. Using these bills as a jumping off point, students can learn how a bill becomes a law, learn about the role of committees and subcommittees in the legislative process, and analyze proposed legislation.

This brochure also includes a summary of how to access these and other bills online through the Texas Legislature Online website, <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/>. By going on the web and finding the bills described herein, students can track how these bills moved, became law, or died in the Texas legislature during the 83rd legislative session. Seeing which bills became law and which bills died will provide the students a perspective on how difficult it is to get a law passed. In addition, by looking at the full text of these bills, students can debate the advantages and disadvantages of each proposed law. For example, there were multiple bills filed this session that related to regulating the use of a cell phone while driving, and only one became law. The students can compare the different proposed laws that are all on the same topic, discussing pros and cons, and finally selecting which bills they think would be most effective if they were to become law. For help planning activities, see the DRSR lessons "How a Bill Moves through the Texas Legislature" and "Evaluating Proposed Traffic Safety Legislation." All of these materials can be found online at http://www.tmcec.com/DRSR/Legislative_Packet.

Traffic Safety-Related Bills that were Filed for the 83rd Legislative Session

Filed in the Texas House of Representatives:

HB 27

Author: Representative Trey Martinez Fischer

Status: Died in the House
Transportation Committee

Summary: This bill sought to amend the law regarding cell phone use by a bus driver. This bill would have made it illegal for a bus driver to use a cell phone while operating a passenger bus, with a minor passenger on the bus, except in case of emergency or if the passenger bus was stopped. It would have also banned a bus driver from using a cell phone to read, write, or send a text message while operating a bus unless the bus was stopped. This bill was not even heard in committee.

HB 38

Author: Representative José Menéndez

Status: Sent to the Governor to become law

Summary: This law will increase the penalty for anyone who alters, fails to install, or installs a counterfeit airbag in a vehicle. This law will increase the punishment from a Class A misdemeanor to a state jail felony, and make it a first degree felony if the failure to install, the alteration of, or the installation of a counterfeit airbag results in the death of a person.

HB 41

Author: Representative José Menéndez

Status: Died in the House
Transportation Committee

Summary: This bill sought to amend the law about using a cell phone while driving a car in a school zone. This bill would have banned the use of a cell phone — including using it to dial a telephone number, or to read, write, or send a text message or email — in a school zone unless the car was in park, the parking brake was applied, or the cell phone was a hands-free device.

HB 63

Author: Representative Tom Craddick

Status: Died in the Senate
Transportation Committee

Summary: Known as the Alex Brown Memorial Act, in honor of a 17-year-old girl from Wellman, Texas who died in a rollover accident on her way to school because she was texting and driving, this bill sought to make it a crime in Texas for a driver to use a cell phone to read, write, or send a text message, instant message, or email while driving a car, unless the car was stopped. During the previous legislative session, a similar bill by Representative Craddick was sent to Governor Rick Perry to become law, but the Governor vetoed the bill. This session the bill did not make it to the Governor's desk, and died in the Senate Transportation Committee.

HB 260

Author: Representative Bill Callegari
Status: Reported from the House
Criminal Jurisprudence
Committee

Summary: Known as the Todd Levin Memorial Act, in honor of a man who died instantly when his car was struck by a drunk driver, this bill sought to require that all persons convicted of driving while intoxicated have an ignition interlock device installed in their vehicle. Representative Callegari has filed similar bills in past sessions, also with no luck.

HB 347

Author: Representative Jim Pitts
Status: Sent to the Governor to
become law

Summary: This is the only bill from this legislative session relating to using a cell phone while driving that was sent on to Governor Perry to become law. This bill will extend the current prohibition on using a cell phone while driving to the property of a public or private elementary or middle school during the time a reduced speed limit is in effect for the school crossing zone, unless the vehicle is stopped or a hands-free device is used.

HB 609

Author: Representative Marisa Márquez
Status: Referred to the House
Transportation Committee

Summary: This bill sought to allow traffic cameras at railroad crossings, much like there are currently red light traffic cameras at intersections. It would have created a civil penalty.

Filed in the Texas Senate:

SB 181

Author: Senator Glenn Hegar
Status: The law as of May 24, 2013

Summary: This law now allows a motor vehicle operator the option of providing evidence of financial responsibility -- most often, car insurance -- by showing an officer an image displayed on a cell phone. This bill is a good example of the law catching up with technology.

SB 275

Author: Senator Kirk Watson
Status: Signed by the Governor and
will become law on
September 1, 2013

Summary: This law will enhance the penalty for an accident involving personal injury or death from a third degree felony to a second degree felony, making the punishment for hit and run fatalities the same as for intoxication manslaughter. This law is designed to combat the problem of people leaving the scene of a collision when alcohol is involved who are looking to avoid intoxication-related charges.

SB 510

Author: Senator Robert Nichols
Status: Signed by the Governor and
will become law on
September 1, 2013




Summary: This law seeks to improve highway worker safety by expanding the move over/slow down law. The law will now apply to TxDOT vehicles that are not separated by control devices and are using their signals, as well as stationary emergency vehicles and tow trucks.

How to Access Bills Online

Go to the Texas Legislature Online website: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/>

To look up bills using the bill numbers provided in this brochure:

- In the center of the homepage, locate the "Legislation" tab. Then, from the dropdown menu that appears when you hold your mouse over the "Legislation" tab, select "Bill Lookup."
 - Type the bill number into the search box. Examples of formats for different bill numbers are given at the top of the page.
 - Next, select the legislative session that the bill was filed during. For the current session, which is the 83rd regular session, choose "83(R) – 2013."
 - Next, select the "Information Type" from the dropdown menu. If you are not sure what information you need, leave this section on "History."
 - Finally, click "Submit."
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- You are now on the "History" tab of the bill you were looking for. This page provides basic information about the bill. From here you can navigate to all the other information you will need using the other tabs at the top of the page, including:
 - "Text": the text of the bill, plus fiscal notes, analyses, and other documents relating to the bill
 - "Actions": actions that have been taken on the bill
 - "Companions": matching bills that have been filed in the other chamber
 - "Amendments": changes to the bill
 - "Authors": who the authors of the bill are
 - "Sponsors": who the sponsors of the bill are
 - "Captions": a short summary of what the bill is about
 - "Bill Stages": where the bill is in the legislative process

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