

Moms don't want other next of kin to suffer like them

By Kelli Wynn
Staff Writer

COLUMBUS — In August of 2006, Carmela Wiant got a call from her son's girlfriend who told her that her son had been in a car accident on Interstate 270.

Wiant, 49, of Mechanicsburg, said she then called the hospital where her son was taken and put in contact with the hospital's chaplain. She said he kept telling her not to rush to the hospital.

When Wiant asked if her son was dead, she said the chaplain said, "Yes."

Wiant believes no one should have to be notified about their loved one like she was:

"If we have the next of kin on the driver's license and registration, then the law enforcement agencies and hospitals would have the information quickly and be able to inform families or friends in the most appropriate way possible," Wiant said.

That's why she teamed up with Linda Wuestenberg, 55, of Columbus, to promote the Money-Burge Act.

If approved by Ohio legislators and the governor next year, the act will allow those who apply for a motor vehicle registration, driver's license, commercial driver's license, temporary instruction permit or identification card to list next of kin contact information through the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

The act, which is named after Wiant's son David Money, 23, of Columbus and Wuestenberg's son Steve Burge, 33, of Columbus, was introduced to the state's Senate and House of Representatives last week.

Wuestenberg said it took seven hours for her to be notified by her son's employer about her son's Feb. 11 accident. He died Feb. 12 from his injuries.

Burge's crash happened at about 2 a.m. on Scioto-Darby Creek Road. After he was taken to the hospital, Pickaway County Sheriff's deputies sought Burge's next of kin at his home and then discovered he lived alone.

Eventually, they discovered a neighbor who had a key to Burge's home. When they entered, the neighbor saw Burge's cell phone and called the last number he dialed. That number belonged to one of Burge's co-workers who then called Burge's supervisor. The supervisor then left his home and drove 30 miles to work, where he retrieved Burge's emergency contact information and called Wuestenberg.

"I'm just angry that I could not have been there for those seven hours," Wuestenberg said. "With the technology that is available today there is no reason that we can't have next of kin information available in the BMV database."

Do you want to propose a bill?

Here is what Ohio Sen. Keith Faber and Ohio Rep. Jim McGregor suggest you do:

Get online and find the legislators in your district.

Contact the legislators — Faber recommends calling them, rather than e-mailing.

Ask for a meeting to talk with them.

Contact your legislator first, but if you are aware of a certain legislator that's passionate about the topic you want to address, you could contact that legislator before contacting the one that represents your district.

Wuestenberg contacted Ohio Rep. Jim McGregor in August and Wiant had contacted Ohio Sen. Keith Faber about a similar bill in April, but the two women didn't know about each other's plans until the legislators put them in contact with one another.

"These folks were in the same geographical region and it still took a long time to find these (relatives)," McGregor said.

Faber and McGregor are hoping that the act will be expedited through the bill process.

Once the act is referred to committees in both chambers, the committees will hold hearings. This will allow citizens and organizations to express their opinions on the subject, McGregor said.

McGregor said there is a possibility that the bill could be voted on in February.

"It could be, by the first of March we could have this on the governor's desk," McGregor said.

Faber said he anticipates the bill will be approved and so far, no one has expressed opposition.

Among the supporters are organ donor associations, Faber said.

McGregor added that the organ donor associations are pleased with the bill because they also believe it will allow the next of kin to be notified quicker and hopefully expedite the organ donation process.

"Our citizens have come up with an easy solution that will help so many," McGregor said. Wiant and Wuestenberg have "solved the problem for many of us."

Contact this reporter at (937) 225-2414 or kwynn@DaytonDailyNews.com.