

Mechanicsburg mother hopes new bill will speed notification of next of kin

BY BREANNE PARCELS

Brown News Service

Two state legislators introduced Sen. Bill 249, officially known as the "Money-Burge Act," in Columbus on Nov. 13. The legislation is named after two men who lost their lives in auto accidents, and their mothers hope the bill will speed notification of next of kin when fatal accidents occur.

Carmela Wiant of Mechanicsburg lost her son, David Money, in a crash in Columbus last year. She and Linda Wuestenberg, mother of "Stevie B." Burge, worked with state Sen. Keith Faber and state Rep. Jim McGregor to develop the bill, which would allow the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to establish a secure database for emergency notification of next of kin with voluntary information provided by individuals obtaining or renewing their drivers' licenses or ID cards, as well as those registering vehicles.

"When we were contacted with

the idea from these two constituents, we originally thought we could do it with a simple rule-change through the BMV, but they determined they could not, so we're introducing this bill to modify the statute," Faber said.

"When tragedy occurs, the next of kin need to be contacted in the most efficient and compassionate manner possible," he added. "This legislation will not only help save valuable time in notifying families, but also offer peace of mind that first responders will be able to contact our loved ones in a more timely fashion if the need should ever arise."

Wiant said she and Wuestenberg both experienced a gap of hours between the time of the crashes that killed their sons and the notification by law enforcement.

"It's something that's been needed for years," Wiant said. "I've never seen a bill that went so fast, with so much support."

Wiant said the heartache from

the loss of her son has not dimmed, but meeting a recipient of Money's organ donation in July helped formulate a productive response to the grief.

"He was a character," Wiant said of her son. "I was looking through some of his pictures (Sunday) night. He was so funny."

Wiant said Money loved to play on his last name.

"He would fold up dollar bills and put them behind his ears and in his pockets, and he would have them hanging off his clothes sometimes," she said.

Faber said only emergency personnel and BMV employees will have access to the next-of-kin database.

"It's sort of like what people do with their cell phones, having an 'ICE' entry in their phone book 'in case of emergency' contact," Faber said. "This measure will be totally voluntary, as well."

If enacted, the legislation would provide drivers with a specific place to file their emergency

contact information. The BMV would set up the necessary data storage program at a one time cost of \$60,000.

"Unfortunately in situations like this, hours and even minutes can mean the difference in a family member having an opportunity to see their loved one just one last time before they pass on," McGregor said. "It is important that we provide emergency personnel with the resources necessary to contact those closest to victims of motor vehicle accidents."

The BMV estimates implementing these changes to their system would take approximately 180 days and involve an educational campaign to familiarize constituents with its purpose while ensuring them their information would be safe, with all necessary precautions to ensure information is not compromised, according to a press release.

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