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## Young drivers / Ditch the decals

Posted: Sunday, September 11, 2011 12:01 am

New Jersey's graduated driver's license program is a good idea, and there is evidence that it has saved lives.

The law, adopted in 2001, gives new drivers under 21 a one-year probationary license that allows only one passenger to be in a car with a new driver unless a parent or guardian is present. It also imposes an 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. driving curfew.

The state Division of Highway Traffic Safety says fatal accidents involving teenage drivers declined from 67 in 2004 to 28 in 2010. All accidents involving teenage drivers declined from 56,000 in 2004 to 43,000 in 2010.

But in 2010, lawmakers added another restriction to the program. The legislation, called Kyleigh's Law, after a 16-year-old Morris County girl who died in a 2006 accident when she was a passenger in a car driven by another teen, requires new drivers to attach a reflective red decal to their license plates so that they can easily be identified by police.

The law has proved to be wildly unpopular. Many parents refuse to allow their children to display the decals, fearing that they will make young drivers targets of sex offenders.

Others oppose the decals because they don't think police should be able to profile young drivers.

Attorney General Paula Dow is currently reviewing the decal law along with the rest of the provisions of the graduated license program. She is expected to issue a report in October. She should recommend that the decal law be repealed.

When it was first enacted, the decal provision seemed like a sensible idea to us, but it is now clear that it just isn't working. It is rarely enforced and widely ignored. And because it is so unpopular, it may actually endanger the acceptance of the rest of the graduated license program.

And the fact is, there simply aren't enough police to enforce these kinds of laws if average people don't see the sense in them. If students and their parents support the probationary license, it will save lives. If they don't, it will be just another good intention gone bad.

On Aug. 20, our area was reminded of just how quickly a routine drive can turn into a tragedy when four students at Mainland Regional High School were killed in a car accident on the Garden State Parkway. The students, all members of the Mainland football team, were among eight occupants of an SUV whose driver had a probationary license.

In eulogies for the students, speakers exhorted their classmates and other members of the community to take care of each other. It would be a fitting memorial to these young men if their friends, classmates and other students throughout our area recommitted themselves to adhering to the provisions of the graduated license program.

Driving can be so dangerous. Accidents can happen so unexpectedly. And our young people are so important.

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