

New law links teen behavior with driving

By [Lisa Singleton-Rickman](#)
Staff Writer

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Students with disciplinary troubles at school will soon have more incentive to behave if they want to get their driver's license.

"Taylor's Law" passed the Alabama Legislature last week and awaits Gov. Bob Riley's signature, which is expected within nine days. It's been five years since the bill was first introduced in the Alabama Senate.

The law will delay teens with school discipline problems from getting a driver's license by creating a point system. For each accrued point for disciplinary actions at school, the student would have one week added to the age at which he or she would be eligible to apply for a permit or license.

The bill is named for Muscle Shoals resident David Keith Taylor, who was killed in November 2002 when a teenage drunken driver ran a stop sign in Elgin, hitting Taylor's van at a speed of 85 mph, according to reports.

Longtime Shoals educator Lisa Moses authored the bill and has been involved in the process of getting it passed since its introduction.

Sen. Bobby Denton, D-Muscle Shoals, was the initial sponsor of the bill five years ago. State Rep. Mike Curtis, D-Greenhill, sponsored the bill this year in the House.

Moses said she hopes the system will be in place statewide at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year. It will not cost the state or individual school districts, as the point system will be administered through STI, the state's uniform data reporting system for all public school districts.

"This law is about providing incentive for students, and the beauty of it is that it also provides opportunity for students to have points taken off their records with good behavior," Moses said. "Those students who acquire points for disciplinary problems will have the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and regain a clear status. It's simply about ensuring

responsibility and maturity in these students who are about to gain a driver's license."

Moses said she is proud of the bill's integrity, adding that its usefulness and value was never questioned by either Republicans or Democrats.

Curtis said Taylor's Law, from the beginning, had "great bipartisan support."

Until this year, the bill simply did not make it for the full vote of the Legislature because of various unanticipated reasons. In its first year, for instance, the legislative session came to an abrupt end because of political in-fighting without any bills on the docket being addressed.

"It was encouraging all along that we had great support on the bill and that all our legislators saw the need for it," Moses said. "I've enjoyed the journey, even through the disappointments, of watching the (legislative) process."

Moses said she was encouraged by Denton's willingness to take on the bill.

"I was just an insignificant school teacher from Lauderdale County when I took this to Sen. Denton, but he took the time to listen to me and get on board with this bill and he supported it from the beginning," Moses said. "He'll never know what his immediate and continuous support has meant to me. I believe the payoff will be in the good it does for Alabama students."

Taylor left behind a wife, Melissa, and two young daughters.

Melissa said the news of the bill becoming law was a welcomed relief to her family.

"This was special for my children to have such good come from such tragedy," she said.

Taylor's brother, Kevin, worked on the bill with Moses and got emotional talking about its passage.

"My first thought was relief, knowing that David's death didn't go without something really good coming from it," he said. "My hope is that this law will prevent another teenager from making the same mistake that this (teenager) made."

He praised Moses' tenacity and dedication to follow through on the legislative process.

"She just did an excellent job and is a tremendous lady," Kevin Taylor said. "She never got discouraged, and I never did get to the point that I thought it wouldn't pass. We're just really grateful to everyone who contributed so much to this."