

# Woman campaigns to label cars driven by ‘Newly Licensed’

## Magnets on vehicle would alert other drivers to teens with new licenses

By [Ralph Ellis](#)

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Donne Kessler, 16, of Kennesaw drives a nice-looking car — a black 2006 Acura RSX coupe. But his parents made Donne put something on the back that’s not so cool: a 4-by-8-inch magnet that tells the world “Caution — Newly Licensed.”

His mom, Susie Kessler, would like to see every teenager in Georgia do the same. She thinks other drivers will back off when they see the magnets — a good idea around new drivers who are too aggressive and those too timid.

Donne said he doesn’t like the magnet, but it works.

“In driver’s education we learned about the ‘space cushion’ that should be between cars,” he said. “When you have the magnet on, you automatically have that.”

Susie Kessler’s campaign has distributed about 15,000 magnets in the state so far. Now she’s got the attention of state Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock), who said he’s considering writing a bill requiring the magnets for young drivers in Georgia. Details such as what ages would be covered haven’t been figured out, he said. Kessler would like to see a law cover learner’s permits and first-year licenses.

But does the idea have a chance?

Teen driving laws have faced a mixed reception in Georgia. Joshua’s Law, mandating that teens seeking a license before the age of 17 take a driver’s education course, passed in 2005. But last session, a bill that would prohibit teen drivers from using cellphones behind the wheel didn’t get far. Neither did a 2005 bill calling for young drivers to place identifying bumper stickers on their cars.

“It’s hard to say ‘no’ to teen safety these days,” noted Atlanta Municipal Judge Gary Jackson, who has been involved in many traffic safety campaigns. “But in a 40-day session, there’s only so much the Legislature can do.”

Kessler said it’s a matter of life and death, not politics. Wrecks are the leading killer of 16- to 20-year-olds, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Kessler said more teenagers are killed each year in wrecks (more than 5,000) than the number of coalition troops killed in Iraq since the start of the war.

“This whole thing is just out of control,” Kessler said.

Several years ago, Kessler said she started to worry about her youngest child, Donne, learning to drive in Atlanta’s heavy traffic; her other kids learned when the family lived in Ohio. With a background in marketing, Kessler and friends started the Caution and Courtesy Driver Alliance.

Identifying young drivers is not an original idea. England and Australia have long required placards marking new drivers. New Jersey just passed a set of tough teen driving laws, including one requiring a special decal on license tags for people with learner’s permits and new licenses. Headline writers dubbed the decals “the carlet letter.”

The intent in New Jersey, though, differs. Pam Fischer, director of the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety, said the decals are intended to help police spot new drivers. Kessler’s magnets aim to alert other drivers as well, making safety a communal affair.

“I thought it would be great to have something on the car that says, ‘My kid is just learning, stay away,’ ” she said.

Magnets cost about \$10 each. For more information or to purchase magnets, go to [www.newlylicensed.com](http://www.newlylicensed.com)