Md. MVA proposes 8-year licenses

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Nathan Krasnopoler was killed when an 83-year-old woman ran over him in Baltimore. His mother want additional requirements for older drivers. (Courtesy Photo)

Kate Ryan, wtop.com

ANNAPOLIS, Md.- As the population ages, so do drivers. A new bill proposed by the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration would allow people to keep their licenses longer and without having to take so many tests.

At least one family says this could create dangerous conditions on the road, while the MVA says convenience is a major advantage to changing the renewal guidelines.

"This will help us retain our current wait time levels or reduce the wait-times," said MVA Administrator John Kuo.

It also will save the state money, though how much remains unclear. But given Maryland's continuing growth and cuts to MVA staff, Kuo said there is pressure to streamline the process while saving money.

AAA Mid-Atlantic spokesman Lon Anderson said his organization did not take a position on the bill. Sure, drivers would love to spend less time in line at the MVA and not have to return for things such as renewals as often, but, "the concerns here are very real."

Anderson worries about older drivers and thinks extending the renewal period from five years to eight years might be too much? In Virginia, drivers renew licenses every eight years.

"As we get older, the difference in our physiology can be significant," Anderson said. "In eight years it can be huge. We want to protect the rights of drivers," but public safety is a concern too. It's a conundrum."

Anderson and Kuo both acknowledged the concerns of Susan Cohen, whose 20-year-old son, Nathan Krasnopoler, was killed last year when an 83-year-old woman hit him as he rode his bicycle in Baltimore.

The driver had just made a U-turn and told police she'd seen Krasnopoler, but didn't see him when she turned into a driveway. In fact, she had turned directly into his path and pinned him under her car.

"She drove over him," Cohen said during a Maryland Senate Committee hearing. "She left the car running. She left the car. She sat on a wall, and that was it."

Citing the growing number of aging drivers, Cohen wants additional requirements for getting driver's licenses renewed.

Currently any driver over 40 has to take a vision test. In addition, Cohen would like to see drivers take a functional capacity test. It's already given to drivers who have been identified as having some kind of medical or physical issues.

"Instead of going to your eye doctor, you'll go to one of the 10 sites that MVA has to do the functional capacity test," she said. "You'll get your little slip of paper that says you passed, and you'll get your license renewal."

At Wednesday's hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, several senators suggested that Cohen's concerns might be addressed through separate legislation.