

Lawmakers Reviewing Md.'s Licensing Laws for Senior Citizens

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Two years after a Johns Hopkins University student was struck and killed by an elderly driver, the victim's mother appeared before a legislative committee in Annapolis.

Susan Cohen is asking state lawmakers to review the state's licensing laws for senior citizens. Cohen's 20-year-old son, Nathan Krasnopoler, was riding his bicycle near the Hopkins Homewood campus in February, 2011 when he was struck by a car driven by an 83-year-old woman. Krasnaopoler was pinned under the woman's car, but the elderly driver got out and did nothing to render assistance.

Susan Cohen is upset with a new law that requires Maryland drivers who renew their licenses to do so every eight years instead of every five years. The change was designed to save the state money. But the new law only requires drivers to show up in person to renew their licenses once every 16 years.

Cohen says "That means an age 70 driver would renew and then not actually have to set foot in the MVA until they're 86 and that's just not really a good situation."

"You know they don't know that they're reaction time or their ability to process a number of different factors to make a quick decision has changed," said Cohen.

Jake Nelson, Director of Traffic Safety Advocacy and Research at AAA says "If you look at the crash data, what we learn is older drivers are actually among the safest on the road. When they do crash, they're most likely to kill themselves, not other road users."

Nelson supports laws that would require elderly drivers to renew their licenses more often than every eight years. "The more frequently that can occur, the more likely we are to detect challenges that the individual may be facing. The Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration is currently conducting a detailed study of elderly drivers.

A final report is expected to be released later this year, and legislators are expected to use the findings to consider updating laws that would impact elderly drivers.

Susan Cohen says she is not trying to discourage senior citizens from driving. "We want to keep drivers on the road, we just want them to be safer," said Cohen.

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