

Parents Advocate Competency Tests For Older Drivers After Their Son Is Hit & Killed

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Reporting Jessica Kartalija

BALTIMORE (WJZ)— When an older driver hit and killed a Hopkins student, his parents targeted people they believe should no longer get behind the wheel.

Jessica Kartalija looks at the controversy over testing older drivers.

No one knew a ride home from the Farmers' Market would be the last for 20-year-old Nathan Krasnopoler. Now his parents only have pictures to remember their gifted middle child.



“Oh, it’s just heartbreaking,” Susan Cohen, Nathan Krasnopoler’s mother, said. “We really thought that Nathan would figure out a solution to some world problem.”

Riding down University Parkway last February, an 83-year-old driver turned into Nathan Krasnopoler’s path as she pulled into her driveway. Krasnopoler tumbled over her car and was trapped underneath. Stunned, she got out of the car and sat down.

“Minutes and minutes are going by, and with each passing minute, he’s losing his brain cells,” Cohen said.

After six agonizing months waiting for Nathan Krasnopoler to come out of a coma, his parents made the hardest of choices, taking him off life support.

“This is an example of older people being in denial about their abilities,” Mitchell Krasnopoler, Nathan Krasnopoler’s father, said.

Mitchell Krasnopoler and Susan Cohen believe some older drivers shouldn’t be behind the wheel. They want the state to require them to take competency tests. Currently, 27 states and the District of Columbia require additional testing.

“Kartalija: “So you’re not saying, ‘Get these people off the road altogether.’”

Mitchell Krasnopoler: “We just want to get the risky drivers off the road.”

John Eberhard spent decades developing plans for driver retesting for the government, but over time realized forcing a competency test on an older driver is a bad idea.

“Testing is unfair. If we had really refined tools that could really, really target in and find “the bad apples” that would be one thing. But we don’t have those,” Eberhard, an aging and transportation consultant, said.

Drivers 65 and older have fewer fatal accidents but they also drive less. When you consider the number of miles they drive, the fatal accident rate increases sharply. And by the time they’re 80, it’s actually four times higher than for younger drivers.

“I believe there’s many drivers on the road today that don’t have what it takes to drive safely,” Cohen said.

There's no denying we go through physical changes as we age.

“They're going to be changes in vision. Hearing can be diminished, which can affect their ability to hear sirens and different warning signals. They may begin to have problems with reflex time,” explained Dr. Susan Levy, medical director for the Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center.

A simulator at the National Academy of Sciences shows the differences between a typical driver's vision and that of an older driver.

Kartalija: “It's grey out the side windows and everything in the front just isn't as vivid.”

Nathan Krasnopoler's parents say re-evaluating older drivers could save lives.

Kartalija: “Do you think we need to do this so another family doesn't have to go through what you're going through?”

Mitchell Krasnopoler: “This tragedy didn't really need to happen. If

we're successful, this is something that's going to save a lot of heartache among many, many different people.”

Several area programs allow seniors to test their driving skills and help them adjust to physical changes. For AAA's driving tips, click [here](#). And for Sinai Hospital's Driving Evaluation and Training Program, click [here](#).