

Kerrville Daily Times

Law puts brakes on seniors

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A new law requiring older drivers to take vision tests has some local seniors seeing red.

The Texas Legislature passed a law to try to prevent accidents involving elderly drivers by approving Katie's Law. It requires drivers age 79 and older to renew their license in person and pass a vision test. Starting at age 85, driver's licenses would expire every two years and the Texas Department of Public Safety could require a written or driving test. Currently, Texas law requires driver license renewal every six years.

Kerrville resident G.M. Miller said the new law is not based on empirical information.

"The law is a crock," he said. "What they did was take some figure out of the blue and said per mile that senior citizens have more accidents."

Miller said he received several calls from friends who are confused by the law.

"I just had my driver license renewed, and it says 2013 as my expiration. There's someone who had 2029 on theirs," he said. "Does that mean I have to get my driver license renewed again this year?"

Several questions remain unanswered, such as the penalties for not renewing a license every two years and how seniors will be notified about the new law.

A representative from the Texas Department of Public Safety said earlier this week that the law is so new they are still sorting out how it is going to work.

Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, introduced the bill in the House known as "Katie's Law." It was named for 17-year-old Katie Bolka, who was killed in 2006 by a 90-year-old woman who ran a red light and slammed into her car at an intersection.

Branch wrote in the bill's analysis that the tighter rules for elderly drivers is

necessary.

"Drivers ages 75 and older have higher rates of fatal accidents than any other group except teenagers, and drivers over 80 are more than twice as likely to be at fault in a fatal collision than the average driver," he wrote. "Elderly drivers also represent the fastest growing segment of the driving population. In the next 10 years, the number of elderly drivers is estimated to double."

According to Texas DPS, there are more than 480,000 licensed drivers ages 79 and older.

Miller said while he feels the law is good for some, it's not fair that all senior drivers are included.

"I have never had a ticket. I don't even know what a ticket looks like," he said. "I have never caused an accident, but some guy with his arm around his girlfriend banged into the back of my car.

"It sort of bugs me that I am singled out. I am extremely healthy — just had my eyes examined, and I am talking 20/20."

Miller said he and others want to see the evidence that seniors cause more accidents than other drivers.

"The whole point is there is no empirical data that supports the actions of the legislature in Austin," he said. "That's the whole gist of the complaints."

Two other states — New Hampshire and Illinois — also re-test older drivers.

Katie's law takes affect Sept. 1.

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