

# READING EAGLE

## Family says legacy of daughter killed in DUI will be saving other lives

By Alex Rose [arose@21st-centurymedia.com](mailto:arose@21st-centurymedia.com) @arosedelco on Twitter Feb 17, 2020 Comments



State Rep. Tom Killion, a Delaware County Republican, speaks about Deana's Law near a large poster of Deana Eckman, who was killed by a repeat DUI driver.

The family of Deana Eckman has been living in an endless nightmare since she was killed by a drunken driver one year ago Sunday, but they say they hope her senseless death will at least help save the lives of others.

"It's like living a dream that you can never wake up from, except it's a nightmare," said her mother, Roseann DeRosa. "It's just a lifelong nightmare. I think we're still in some kind of shock over it that she's no longer here and that's the hardest part."

Eckman, 45, of Delaware County was killed by David Strowhouer in a drunken-driving crash as she and her husband, Chris, were returning home from a family gathering Feb. 16, 2019.

The crash occurred about 9:30 p.m., when Strowhouer's 2016 Dodge Ram 250 pickup truck crossed a double-yellow line and slammed head-on into the 2019 Subaru WRX Chris and Deana Eckman were driving. Strowhouer's blood-alcohol level was 0.199% and he had traces of cocaine, diazepam and marijuana in his system at the time.

Strowhouer, 30, of Newtown Square, Delaware County, pleaded guilty to homicide by vehicle while driving under the influence and related offenses. He was sentenced to 25 1/2 to 50 years in state prison. He is appealing that sentence.

## History of DUI

The case made headlines not only because of the tragedy, but Strowhouer's history of DUI arrests.

Online court records indicate Strowhouer had five prior DUIs on his record since 2010 and was on probation for a previous offense at the time of the crash. He had pleaded guilty to his third and fourth DUIs at the same time in Chester County on Oct. 2, 2017, and was sentenced to a total of 1 1/2 to 3 years in state prison. Later that same month, he pleaded to a fifth DUI before Judge Mary Alice Brennan in Delaware County for DUI: controlled substance – combination alcohol/drug as a third offense. Strowhouer was allowed to serve his sentence in the Delaware County case at the same time as the Chester County sentence.

Roseann DeRosa said the criminal justice system had failed her family miserably and that Strowhouer's last DUI conviction should never have been run concurrently. Their pleas were heard by state Sen. Tom Killion, a Delaware County Republican who set out to craft Deana's Law, a package of reforms that would increase penalties for multiple DUI offenders and impose the use of continuous alcohol monitoring bracelets statewide for the first time.

## Daily battle

"It's been like a blur between the court hearings and the discussions with Deana's Law and all the other things that have been going on," Eckman's father, Rich DeRosa, said of the past year. "It's really kept us occupied, but it's still been a year of torture."

Rich DeRosa said his daughter loved the camera so there are pictures of her all over the house and she is never out of their thoughts.

"It's just hard to believe that she's not here," he said. "I find it hard to concentrate on anything anymore. I just seem to have lost interest in a lot of things that I always enjoyed. Everything that I have to do now is an effort, even writing a check to pay the electric bill. You just don't want to do it. Just simple things like that."

"It doesn't get better, and it doesn't get easier," said Roseann. "You just learn to live, you just learn to survive. It's a battle. Every day is a battle."

But she said she does draw strength from a strong family system and has a bereavement group of women who have also lost children that help get her through.

"We can all relate to each other, we all understand each other, and I think that is the best," she said. "You have to be with people who are in this situation to even understand the gravity of it."

## Legislative action

Rich and Roseann are also happy with the way Deanna's Law has been crafted and the speed with which it has been moving through the Legislature. The bill overwhelmingly passed in the Senate 43-6 last month and has been referred to the House Transportation Committee.

The version passed by the Senate would require anyone convicted of a third DUI to serve a sentence consecutive to any other sentence imposed by the court and increase jail time for repeat offenders. Current sentencing guidelines for fourth and fifth offenses are 3 1/2 to 7 years, but the bill would raise those to 5 to 10 years and 10 to 20 years, respectively.

It also imposes preventative measures by mandating statewide use of continuous alcohol monitoring devices, also known as CAM (or "SCRAM" for Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor). These devices are affixed to offenders in the same manner as house arrest devices but sample and test the wearer's perspiration for the presence of alcohol.

If the device senses alcohol in the wearer's system, a signal is transmitted to a monitoring agency that can notify police to detain the person before they drive in the hopes of averting another tragedy.

Rich DeRosa said he has been examining mark-ups to the bill since it arrived in the House, including a cost estimate for enforcement.

"But the cost estimate only shows the added costs and doesn't show what could be saved by keeping some of these dangerous people off the street, or maybe the forced rehabilitation from the added penalties that are imposed by the law," he said. "One of the senators that cast a negative vote on the bill, he said we have to be fiscally responsible. And he's right, but ... what cost do you put on a life?"

Still, Roseann said most legislators seem to be supportive and she is confident it will pass with the provisions they wanted to see. Rich still thinks a Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS) being developed by a public-private partnership that would automatically stop a car from moving if it detects alcohol on the driver is the best technology being developed currently, but that is still in the testing phase.

In the meantime, Rich and Roseann are focused on getting Deana's Law passed and keeping their family together. Roseann said she sees Chris Eckman every day and there is a Sunday dinner with family every week. They also get together monthly with a larger group of family and friends for pizza night to help support one another, a tradition they have kept going since last February.

Roseann said the DeRosa and Eckman families planned to go to Chris' house Sunday for a luncheon, where they can grieve together and help each other through another day without Deana.

The DeRosas also praised Killion and his staff for their continuing work on the bill and keeping the family informed on its progress.

Killion said last week that he has spoken to Rep. Tim Hennessey, a Montgomery County Republican who chairs the Transportation Committee.

"He's willing to move the bill out of committee," Killion said. "It just needs a couple tweaks, just some technical changes and amendments, which we hope will be done right after the appropriations process. So I'm anticipating having it back out of the House and back in the Senate to concur with the House amendments and get it to the governor's desk by the spring."

Killion said the proposed changes involve some suggestions from the court system on implementation but are nothing major that would alter the scope or intent of the bill.

"The goal is that we're going to try to keep this from ever happening again," Killion said. "You're never going to stop it completely, but when you have the folks that are repeat offenders that haven't learned their lesson after the first, second, third, fourth, fifth time ... These are people that have proven time and time again – they don't care. They're driving anyway."