

Deana's Law bill imposing strict DUI penalties advances to House

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

CHADDS FORD—The Transportation Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Wednesday passed Deana’s Law, groundbreaking legislation sponsored by Senator Tom Killion (R-Chester & Delaware), requiring the use of innovative technology to combat drunk driving and named in memory of DUI homicide victim Deana Eckman.

“In less than 16 month since Deana Eckman’s violent death at the hands of individual now convicted of his sixth DUI, we are just steps away from honoring her memory by better protecting Pennsylvanians from the worst of the worst DUI offenders,” said Killion.

Deana Eckman was killed in a head-on collision on February 16, 2019 in Upper Chichester Township, Delaware County. The individual convicted in the crash, which seriously injured Deana’s husband, Chris, pleaded guilty to third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle while driving under the influence, and a host of other felonies and has been sentenced to 25 to 50 years in prison.

“Deana’s Law will target repeat DUI offenders that have high rates of blood alcohol,” said Rich and Roseann DeRosa, parents of Eckman. “This law has been our passion since the senseless loss of our daughter’s life. We will not let her life be lost in vain. Our passion and goal is to save lives & spare other families this terrible pain and suffering.”

“Deana’s story is tragic, heartbreaking and completely unfair,” said Rep. Tim Hennessey (R-Chester & Montgomery). “As Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, I believe Deana’s Law will be a critical step in protecting our drivers by stopping repeat DUI offenders from risking the safety of all those on the roads.”

The legislation, Senate Bill 773, numbered in honor of Deana’s birth month and year, will mandate the use of continuous alcohol monitoring (CAM) devices for the first time in Pennsylvania. Similar to home arrest monitors and other devices affixed to offenders, CAM devices are strapped to the wearer.

Requiring those arrested for a third or subsequent DUI offense be fitted with a CAM device is just one of the innovative methods and changes provided for in Deana’s Law. Killion’s legislation would also:

- Increase jail time for those convicted of three DUIs or more. Those convicted of a fourth offense would be subject to a five to 10 year sentence rather than the current three-and-a-half to seven years. Fifth and subsequent DUI convictions would expose the felony offender to a 10 to 20 year rather than the current three-and-a-half to seven years.
- Require the imposition of consecutive sentences after conviction. Deana’s Law would mandate that those convicted of a third DUI offense serve the sentence for that offense consecutively to any other sentence the offender is serving and to any other sentence to be imposed by the court.

“I’m grateful to Chairman Hennessey and the members of the House Transportation Committee,” said Killion. “I am hopeful that we can get Deana’s Law to the governor’s desk in short order.”

“There is no word strong enough to describe the lifelong pain of outliving your child,” said the DeRosas. “Deana’s Law will be her legacy.”