



# Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

February 21, 2003

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

[www.udetc.org](http://www.udetc.org)

**The OJJDP Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative supports cooperation between community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.**

## Alabama Gets Graduated Driver's Licensing

It took 3 years, but Alabama's Legislature recently passed a graduated licensing law for young drivers. The law, which took effect in October of 2002, is expected to yield a significant decrease in traffic deaths among youth.

"Graduated Driver's Licensing" (GDL) policies provide young drivers with controlled exposure to increasingly challenging driving scenarios. This can include a minimum amount of daylight practice before night driving is permitted, and it may also include severe sanctions in case of drunken driving. A number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of graduated licensing in reducing youth traffic fatalities, both alcohol-involved and non-alcohol-involved.

The effort to pass graduated licensing in Alabama began with State Representative John Hawkins. Although his initial bill did not pass, the Governor's Advisory Board soon took up the cause. Comprising representatives from more than 30 organizations—such as MADD, the Sheriff's Association, and the Police Chief's Association—the Board took a leadership role in promoting the proposed legislation. The Board was quick to recognize the benefit of GDL, and began holding a series of briefings for legislators, law enforcement, and other concerned persons around the State.

Students from MADD's Youth In Action also took part in the briefings. They researched GDL laws in other States and youth traffic fatalities in Alabama, and then presented their results at the regional briefings. One student, Lee Barkley, was too young to drive at the time, so she was in effect making her own license harder to obtain. Nonetheless, says Lee, GDL is "a great idea, because most teenagers do not have a lot of practice; 'practice' is the key word."

After two more attempts to pass a bill, the Alabama legislature finally passed a graduated licensing law to become effective October 2002. The law restricts night driving, requires a set period of practice time, and prevents young drivers from engaging in risky behaviors such as carrying too many passengers.

**>Our Point:  
Communities, states, and law enforcement are successfully changing laws, regulations, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.**

State officials are already looking forward to the benefits from GDL. Milton Saffold, Department of Economic and Community Affairs, projects the law will reduce underage crashes by 30 percent (based on results from the neighboring States of Florida and Georgia), and Alabama is now eligible for NHTSA incentive funds. However, the State isn't stopping there; they are following up with a public awareness campaign to ensure that the law is understood. Says Saffold, "Now we're doing public education, to tell people what the law is going to do."

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