More bills to be introduced in constant fight against DWIs

By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

More bills will be introduced during the 1983 Legislature as part of continuing attempts to combat drunken drivers, but the volume will be considerably less than the dozens considered during the last regular session.

Three or four main bills will be pushed during the upcoming session which starts Monday, according to representatives of anti-drunken driving groups. The bills were considered but did not win legislative approval last year.

The package will include the establishment of .1 percent blood-alcohol content as conclusive proof a driver is drunk and the addition of negligent vehicular injury and negligent vehicular homicide as crimes.

Also introduced is a bill increasing the age to get a driver's license from 15 to 16.

Another bill that is being contemplated is one to establish administrative revocation so that a driver's license can be taken away immediately upon a drunken driving arrest.

However, that legislation may be put on the back burner because it will require the expenditure of additional sums of money to increase the number of Department of Public Safety officers who handle revocation hearings.

Declining state revenues caused by plummeting oil prices could make this proposal unworkable in the upcoming session, officials said.

The expected few drunken driving bills comes in sharp contrast to the dozens introduced during the 1982 Legislature as Gov. Treen, a number of Louisiana legislators and citizen groups like Mothers Against Drunk Drivers sought ways to reduce the number of traffic deaths and injuries caused by drunken drivers.

Representatives of anti-drunk driving groups give two basic reasons: they don't want the Legislature getting tired of listening to proposals and they want to be able to better track the bills that are introduced.

"If we get any more than four or five bills it will be the same as last year. We had 40 to 45 bills and they (legislators) were sick of hearing it," said Steve Young, director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission.

Dr. Harold Brandt, president of the local MADD chapter, said members of his group learned the hard way last session how difficult it is to track great numbers of bills through the legislative process.

"Have you ever followed 20 bills at one time," Brandt said.

Brandt said MADD will provide a hot line during the legislative session so that interested persons can find out the status of DWI legislation that is introduced.

He said the chapter is in the process of staff the phone line that will be established at its new headquarters. The DWI hotline number is 383-3000, he said.

Meanwhile, Young said it appears that the state's new DWI law requiring mandatory punishment is being accepted on a statewide basis. The legislation, adopted by the 1982 Legislature, went into effect Jan. 1.

"We have received no complaints from any section of the state about judges or jurisdictions dismissing charges," Young said.

Young said various local governments are still applying for the $2 million in funds approved by the January special session to help them with implementation of the new law, even though recommendations have already been made to spend virtually all of it.

"With the amount of proposals we are still receiving I would expect some requests for additional state funding to be made," Young said. "We are still receiving and processing applications. Everyday there are calls for forms. There seems to be a need out there."

Recommendations for the expenditure of the $2 million has already been made to the governor by two special commissions. Those were based on applications submitted prior to the commissions' joint meeting. Over $4 million in requests were considered.

Young said the state will continue to accept applications, however, unless Treen rejects some of the commissions' recommendations or some local governments refuse to accept the reduced sums granted them there won't be a chance for them to be funded.

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