

N.J. starts next-of-kin registry, pre-driver ID cards

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On Sept. 24, 2007, 19-year-old Sara Dubinin was seriously injured in a car crash, but before her family could be notified, the Middlesex County College student fell into a coma and died.

The grief her mother experienced at not being with her only child at the end was transformed into Sara's Law, which creates a next-of-kin registry through New Jersey's Motor Vehicle Commission.

But the law goes farther than setting up a registry for licensed drivers, and for the first time establishes a state-issued ID card for those 14 to 17 years old.

Tamara Rosati of Haddon Heights, mother of a 15-year-old girl, was delighted to learn of the program, which formally started last week.

"As a parent, it is certainly something that would ease my mind," Rosati said, adding that she planned to look into getting one for her daughter Jacqueline, a sophomore at Haddon Heights High School.

Besides the registry, Rosati sees other benefits in Jacqueline's having an official ID, including using it for boarding domestic flights, applying for a passport, or getting her own driver's license when the time comes.

"All the kids have cellphones, but this is an added plus," she said.

The ID, previously available to anyone 17 and older who did not drive or operate a boat, costs \$24, and is renewable every four years. Applicants must provide the same six points of identification required to get or renew a license.

For example, a 15-year-old student could use a passport or birth certificate (4 points) and a school photo ID with a copy of her transcript (2 points) to qualify. Proof of address also is needed, but the transcript would satisfy that requirement if it has that information included. Parental certification also is acceptable if the applicant is under 18.

Those under 17 must be accompanied by a parent when applying for the ID. When it comes time for the teenager to drive, the nondriver ID will qualify as 4 points, just as a license does at renewal time.

Nondriver ID holders are issued a DL number that will follow them through life, even if they don't get a driver's license.

A DL number is needed to be put on the registry, which applicants can do online.

Mairin Bellack, an MVC spokeswoman, said about six million New Jerseyans already have licenses or MVC ID cards and can be included in the registry, which became operational last Monday.

New Jersey follows Delaware, Florida, Ohio, Indiana, Colorado, and Illinois in establishing a next-of-kin registry.

After her daughter's death, Dubinin pushed for the registry, which Gov. Christie signed into law in April 2011.

"I lost my only, beautiful 19-year-old daughter to a horrific crash and was never notified before she succumbed to her injuries," Dubinin said in a statement announcing the registry's launch. "This registry will go a long way in preventing others from having to find out the way I did."

Information provided to the registry will not be available to the public and can be accessed by law enforcement only in an emergency, according to the MVC.