

Governor Chris Christie Signs Jessica Rogers' Law

Friday, April 20, 2012 Tags: [Other](#)

Trenton, NJ – Acting on a commitment to provide law enforcement officials with the tools they need to appropriately prosecute those who threaten the public's safety, Governor Chris Christie today signed into law S-1468, also known as Jessica Rogers' Law. The bill allows for increased criminal penalties for bodily harm caused through the aggressive operation of an auto or vessel, commonly known as "road rage."

The legislation was crafted in response to a 2005 automobile accident involving an incident of "road rage" that left a 16-year-old Hamilton Township girl, Jessica Rogers, requiring 24 surgeries and ultimately paralyzed from the chest down. Because existing laws do not provide adequate penalties for aggressive drivers who cause injuries, the Rogers family has advocated strongly for passage of this bill to increase the penalties for incidents of road rage to ensure that similar tragedies are deterred in the future.

"As a parent, Jessica Rogers' story hits close to home. It is the story of the worst fears we have for our children realized – when they are seriously harmed because of another person's recklessness. Through the actions of an enraged driver, tragedy was levied on the Rogers family and justice was left out of reach because the laws of our state were not adequate to appropriately prosecute the crime," said Governor Christie. "That is why today I am proud to sign this legislation that honors the fight of Jessica and her family over the past 7 years by fixing our laws. This bill enables our law enforcement officials to treat incidents of road rage that cause senseless harm as they should be – as serious and preventable crimes that cannot be tolerated."

Prior to the enactment of Jessica Rogers' Law, the crime of assault by auto or vessel was committed when a person operated a vehicle or craft in a reckless or impaired manner and bodily injury resulted. Accordingly, a "road rage" incident causing injury was charged merely as a fourth-degree crime even if it caused serious bodily injury. Injuries considered less than "serious" were charged as a disorderly persons offense.

Jessica Rogers' Law creates a provision in the assault statute for the purposeful operation of an auto or vessel in an aggressive manner directed at another vehicle. Under this new law, such operations that result in serious bodily injury will be prosecuted as third-degree crimes, and incidents resulting in less serious injuries will be prosecuted as fourth-degree crimes.

Primary sponsors of S-1468/A-2139 were Senator Linda Greenstein (D-Mercer) and Assemblymembers Wayne DeAngelo (D-Mercer and Middlesex), Daniel Benson (D-Mercer and Middlesex) and Paul Moriarty (D-Camden and Gloucester).

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