

Safe Driving and the Law

by Heather Hosfeld

During 2007, Pennsylvania legislators introduced two bills to the Pennsylvania General Assembly designed to promote safe and responsible driving. Both bills were introduced first in the Senate and then referred to the Transportation Committee for review and consideration.

The first bill, SB 651, was introduced in March to address the hazards presented by snow and ice that falls from a moving vehicle. A similar bill was introduced in 2005 by Senator Lisa Boscola shortly after a woman driving on Christmas day was fatally struck by a piece of ice that flew off a truck and broke through her windshield. SB 651 became law in May of this year and holds drivers accountable when snow or ice is dislodged or falls from their moving vehicle and strikes another vehicle or pedestrian causing death or serious bodily injury. The law requires the driver to pay a fine ranging from \$200 to \$1000 for each offense. If there is no death or serious bodily injury (for example, the vehicle is just damaged), the law does not apply.

The second bill, SB 1827, was introduced in September to prohibit Pennsylvania motorists from using handheld mobile telephones while driving. Under the bill, motorists would still be permitted to use a hands-free mobile telephone. If the bill becomes law and you are stopped for using a handheld phone while driving, you will be charged with a summary offense. If you are convicted of the summary offense, you will be required to pay a \$50 fine. You may be able to avoid paying the fine if you were only using the handheld phone because you feared for your safety, you were reporting a traffic accident, or you were making a "911" emergency call. The law would not apply to police officers or emergency vehicle operators who are making telephone calls as part of their job responsibilities.

For a detailed explanation about how a bill becomes law in Pennsylvania, you may visit the Pennsylvania General Assembly's website at http://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/VC/visitor_info/making_law/intro.htm

