

Tri-Valley Herald

Two more DUI bills become law

By Simon Read
STAFF WRITER

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DANVILLE – The parents of two Danville children struck and killed last year by a hit-and-run driver scored a personal victory on Thursday when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law two bills aimed at preventing drunken driving.

The laws, which will go into effect on Jan. 1, will impose harsher restrictions on those who drive impaired or intoxicated. The legislation was championed by Bob and Carmen Pack, who lost their two children to a driver with multiple convictions for driving under the influence.

SB 1694 will increase the state's statute of limitations on previous DUI offenses from seven years to 10 years. SB 1697 will consolidate driver's license restrictions and revocations for DUI violators at the Department of Motor Vehicles, thus streamlining sanctions.

Both bills were co-authored by state Sens. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, and Jackie Speier, D-Hillsborough. Last week, Schwarzenegger signed SB 1696, which requires DUI-treatment providers to send a certificate of completion directly to the DMV.

"We're very excited that the bills have passed and that the governor saw the importance of all three bills," Bob Pack said. "I think it's a sign that our officials want to be proactive in making California a leader in saving lives through stricter DUI laws."

The Packs played a pivotal role in getting the three bills introduced back in February. They traveled to Sacramento and testified before state officials regarding the events of Oct. 26, 2003.

The Packs' children, Troy, 10, and Alana, 7, were killed in Danville on that day. They were riding a bicycle and a scooter, respectively, on Camino Tassajara when a Mercedes 300D jumped the sidewalk at Rassani Drive, according to court records.

Alana died immediately. Troy died that night at Children's Hospital Oakland.

Jimena Barreto, 45, of Walnut Creek was driving the vehicle and left the scene of the accident, records said. Police arrested her two days later in San Jose.

Records said Barreto, a professional nanny, has two prior DUI convictions

and was driving on a suspended license. A grand jury indicted Barreto in May on charges of second-degree murder.

She also faces counts of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated, driving under the influence causing bodily injury, felony hit-and-run, driving on a suspended license and possessing cocaine. Barreto's trial is scheduled to begin on Oct. 18.

"These bills (stemmed) from a horrible tragedy," Torlakson spokesman Robert Oakes said Thursday. "This family that suffered an incredible loss was willing to testify to state legislators. They went out so far."

Oakes said the new laws will eradicate loopholes that allow repeat DUI offenders to stay on the road.

"If these laws had been in place last year, that woman would not have been driving," he said. "But this is a reminder that when good people are willing to take part in the public process, good things can happen."

Steve McKaskey, president of the Alameda County Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said the group supported all three bills throughout the legislative process.

"We believe they will help reduce the death toll due to alcohol-related crashes on our streets and highways," he said.

McKaskey lost his 22-year-old son, Matthew, in a drunken-driving accident in Livermore that also killed two others in February 2001. The driver, Nicole Le Freniere, 22, is serving a six-year term in Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla.

The Packs, meanwhile, said they are not ready to sit back and relax just yet. Already, they are hoping to introduce drug-reform legislation next year.

"There is much more we can do," Bob Pack said. "I would like to say to the governor that this is just the beginning. Next year, 'I'll be back.'"

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