

## **Local pol pushing for cab driver restrictions**

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BY JOE BIESK

A local lawmaker is making another push for new state requirements on cabbies - an endeavor she began after the 2006 death of a Frankfort woman who was killed while hailing a taxi in Chicago.

The proposal, among other things, would require all cab drivers in Illinois to be at least 21 years old and have clean driving records. It also would require cab drivers to maintain valid driver's licenses at all times.

"This is a minimum first step," said state Rep. Renee Kosel (R-New Lenox), the measure's sponsor. "You ought to be able to have some degree of expectation when you get in a taxi cab that you have an experienced, well-qualified driver."

Similar proposals have cleared the Illinois House in the past but have stalled in the Senate. Kosel is hoping for better prospects this year for the plan she brought forward after Lyndsey Whittingham was killed by a cab driver.

The 23-year-old Whittingham, who was a graduate of Marian Catholic High School, was out with friends when she was killed while hailing a cab on Chicago's North Side. Police cited the cab driver with driving too fast for conditions and failing to exercise due care for a pedestrian in a roadway.

Her parents responded, with Kosel's help, by pushing for stricter laws governing cab drivers. They succeeded in passing a bill, dubbed "Lindsey's Law," that required cab drivers who strike pedestrians to undergo drug and alcohol testing.

But they didn't stop there.

Betsy Whittingham, Lindsey's mother, said she wants a statewide law that ensures cab drivers are safe. She said her mission is to help prevent other people from having to endure what her family has.

There is little oversight of cab drivers at the state level.

"Although taxi companies are privately owned, we believe they are providing a public service to the citizens of Illinois and that they need to be safe," Whittingham said. "If you're going to hire someone to drive you from point A to point B you need to know that you will be safe."

Kosel said the plan has met opposition from the city of Chicago in the past because of concerns it might interfere with the city's ability to oversee cabs.

Tarawneh, who owns American Tinley Taxi, said his company also sometimes conducts background checks on prospective drivers.

"I have no problem with it," Tarawneh said of Kosel's plan. "I think that is fine."

A House panel approved the legislation without opposition last week, sending it to the full House for further consideration. It's uncertain when the full House might consider the plan, which also would need Senate approval.

State Rep. John Fritchey (D-Chicago), vice chairman of the House Business and Occupational Licenses Committee, said he supported the plan this year and in years past. Even though the bill previously has stalled in the Legislature, Fritchey noted it sometimes takes multiple tries to get a bill into law.

"The bill strikes a very reasonable compromise between ensuring the safety of taxi passengers while solely targeting individuals that probably have no business driving a cab in the first place," Fritchey said. "That's a concept that everybody should be able to agree with regardless of party or geography."

Nevertheless, Mike Tarawneh, an Orland Park cab driver, said his company already requires its drivers to have a good driving record and between three and four years' experience.