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[New bill would tighten pedestrian responsibilities](#)

Written by: Brien Woolford

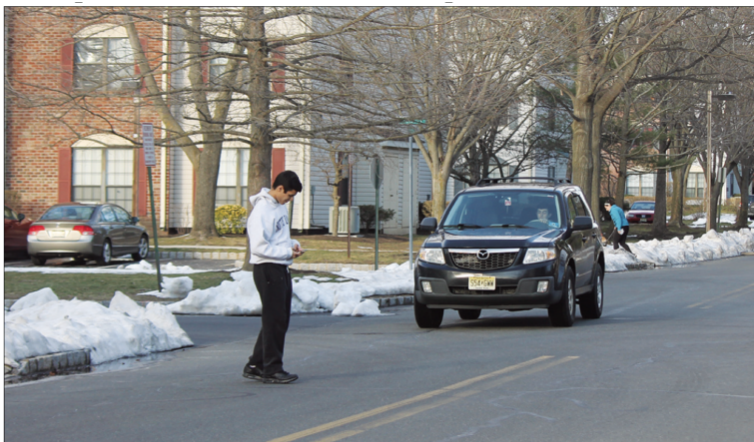


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | JASMINE SANTALLA

If south Jersey Assemblyman Chris Brown has his way, cars will only have to yield to pedestrians actually crossing in a crosswalk, otherwise distracted or jay-walking pedestrians may be held equally culpable in the event of an accident.

South Jersey assemblyman Chris Brown introduced the Driver and Pedestrian Mutual Responsibility Act on Feb. 6, 2017. If passed, it would make it illegal for pedestrians to cross the street without being in the crosswalk zone. The act also looks to introduce a yield for pedestrians at the crosswalk, as opposed to a stop, for drivers.

One of the reasons why Brown wants to repeal the previous law, which concerned pedestrian safety and traffic control, is because he believes that it isn't working.

"Despite the best efforts by the state to raise pedestrian and motorist awareness, through multiple agencies and public relation campaigns, the law 2010 Chapter 319 simply isn't working," Brown told The VOICE, "According to available State Police records, in the four years after the law took effect 2011-2014 pedestrians fatalities increased by nearly 10 percent."

The key difference between the new Driver and Pedestrian Mutual Responsibility Act and the previous law is that that the driver previously had to come to a complete stop at a crosswalk. The new bill requires only that the driver yield.

"There is clearly a conflict between drivers and pedestrians because they are both afraid of each other," said Brittney Moody, a Mercer freshman, studying Business Administration.

The controversy of the proposed bill is deciding the difference between stopping and yielding.

According to Cyndi Steiner, the executive director of the [New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition](#), "It should be a stop, stop and stay stopped. In the law 2010 Chapter 319 was meant to clarify that, because yield is such a vague word."

Steiner's main concern, she says, is about pedestrian rates of survival during an accident, telling The VOICE, "If a car going 25 miles per hour hits someone, they have an 85 percent chance of surviving. If the car is going 40 miles per hour, the pedestrian only has a 15 percent chance of surviving."

Many pedestrians have a different perspective. Through a survey of 30 people conducted in downtown Trenton and downtown Lambertville, 86 percent of people disagreed with Chris Brown's proposal.

According to Benjamin Cole, a 65 year old crossing guard for Trenton Public School System, "New Jersey drivers are almost worse than drivers in New York. They will hit someone and keep driving." He added, "I've been on this corner [Parkside and Stuyvesant] for 3 years and I've seen plenty of accidents, the impatient drivers in Trenton are always speeding to beat the light."

There are many other factors that could cause fatalities on the road that do not involve crosswalks, the main one being cell phone use. According to the National Safety Council report from 2011, 52 percent of car crashes involved a cellphone.

But cell phones can be as much of a distraction for pedestrians as they can be for drivers. "If you are using a cell phone in a crosswalk while walking there should be a fine," said Brittney Moody.

"Unlike the frog in the arcade game who gets many chances, people only get one chance to cross the street safely," assemblyman Brown said, adding, "I would rather adhere to the proverb and follow the common sense of a grandmother, than accept the misguided advice from Trenton politicians."

According to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the most effective way for pedestrians to prevent injuries and deaths are to increase visibility at night by wearing reflective clothes and carrying a flashlight, walk on the sidewalk, and "Whenever possible, cross the street at a designated crosswalk or intersection."

The last suggestion has been found to be even more effective: the installation of "complete streets." Like those found in major metropolitan areas such as New York and Philadelphia, a "complete street" is designed to enable access for pedestrians, bikers, and automobile drivers in the safest way possible by putting in accessible bike lanes, crosswalks, and wide intersections for cars.

The proposed bill has received mixed reactions from both New Jersey residents and those who take advantage of tourist attractions from out of state. These mixed reactions make it unknown whether the proposed legislation will be passed or not. But with last year having 185 traffic deaths in New Jersey that involved pedestrians and cyclists places like Seattle, that have the lowest rate of pedestrian deaths, begin to look much more appealing.

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