



Haine legislation dedicating memorial highway to Uhl sisters passes General Assembly

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SPRINGFIELD, IL -- A measure sponsored by Senator Bill Haine (D-Alton) dedicating a stretch of Interstate 64 in memory of Jessica and Kelli Uhl, two Collinsville sisters who were killed Thanksgiving weekend in 2007 by former Illinois State Trooper Matt Mitchell, who was convicted of reckless homicide for his involvement in the accident, has passed the General Assembly.

"With a heavy heart, we honor the memory of Jessica and Kelli," Haine said. "Upon swift action by the Governor, we will fulfill the wishes of the girls' family and honor their memory."

"While we can never heal the wounds inflicted by this tragic loss of innocent life, we can keep their memory alive for our citizens," Haine added.

Senate Joint Resolution 40 renames the section of Interstate 64 between Exit 19A at Illinois Route 158 and Exit 23 at Illinois Route 4 as the Jessica and Kelli Uhl Memorial Highway. The resolution provides for appropriate signs or plaques to be erected to display this designation. A temporary memorial has already been placed on Highway 158 in honor of Jessica and Kelli Uhl under the fatal accident memorial marker program. The memorial contains the names of the two girls and states "Reckless Driving Costs Lives," but the marker is not visible from Interstate 64 and would be removed in less than two years without legislative action making the memorial permanent.

"Reckless driving can cause such irreparable devastation," Haine stated. "This memorial will also serve as a reminder for those behind the wheel of a vehicle to proceed with the utmost caution."

Following the accident, the Illinois State Police ushered in new rules limiting on-duty officers' use of personal cellular phones and implemented a four-tier system of guidelines specifying how fast troopers may travel while responding to emergency calls.

"It is personally distressing that Mitchell wore the uniform of the Illinois State Police," Haine said. "Mitchell's disgraceful, reckless conduct was clearly an aberration and inconsistent with the tradition of excellence of the Illinois State Police."

In the 2011 spring legislative session, Haine passed a bill in response to Mitchell's workers' compensation claim for injuries he sustained during the accident. The bill, Senate Bill 1147, prohibits a person who is injured or killed at work from collecting workers' compensation benefits if the individual's injury, disablement, or death occurs while he or she was committing a forcible felony, an aggravated DUI, or reckless homicide that resulted in the death or injury of another person and the individual is convicted of the offense. Senate Bill 1147 passed both chambers unanimously and was signed into law by Governor Quinn in August.

"We proceeded with a carefully crafted, thoroughly vetted bill in the Senate," Haine said. "In Illinois, such criminally negligent behavior is no longer rewarded in our workers' compensation system."

Senate Joint Resolution 40 now awaits action by the Governor.