

# **Durbin, Duckworth, Bustos Introduce New Bill to Protect Roadside First Responders**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), along with U.S. Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17), today introduced new legislation designed to reduce first responder roadside deaths. The bill would establish a new national safety priority within an existing federal grant program to increase public awareness of “Move Over” laws and encourage implementation of life-saving vehicle technology.

“We’ve seen heartbreaking roadside accidents in Illinois this year, and we need to reverse the alarming rise in first responder roadside deaths,” Durbin said. “The *Protecting Roadside First Responders Act* will provide states with the resources to better enforce ‘Move Over’ laws and help keep our first responders safe.”

“The troubling pattern of first responder roadside deaths demands action,” said Duckworth. “I’m glad to be working with Senator Durbin and Representative Bustos on this important legislation that will help increase awareness of ‘Move Over’ laws and promote innovative solutions to reduce risk and better protect our first responders.”

“We need to bring an end to the preventable tragedies we have seen along our major roads and highways,” Bustos said. “This legislation will help do just that by ensuring our ‘Move Over’ laws are followed, crash avoidance technology is implemented and our first responders are protected. As the wife of a sheriff, I’m grateful for the work our first responders do every day and I thank Senators Durbin and Duckworth for partnering on these efforts.”

As of October, there have been 29 auto-related first-responder deaths nationwide in 2019, as opposed to 21 at the same time last year. Studies show more than 70 percent of Americans are unaware of Move Over laws like Scott’s Law in Illinois, which requires motorists to slow down and, if possible, move over when they see a parked squad car, fire engine, or ambulance with flashing lights. All 50 states have Move Over laws.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) operates two federal grant programs focused on highway safety, but neither currently addresses Move Over laws. The Section 402 Program provides grants to states to reduce injuries and deaths from motor vehicle accidents by addressing issues such as drug and alcohol-impaired driving, speeding, pedestrian safety, and the enforcement of traffic laws. The Section 405 Program establishes national safety priorities, such as combatting cell phone use among drivers and provides grants to states to address these priorities.

“The job of first responders on our highways who are saving lives and protecting motorists should not be a death-defying act. The *Protecting Roadside First Responders Act* attacks this problem head-on by taking a comprehensive approach to combating distraction and other crash factors that lead to roadside collisions and needless tragedies,” said Cathy Chase, President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates). “Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) commends Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, and Representative Cheri Bustos for their safety leadership in introducing this legislation. It will ensure proven technologies – automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning, and blind-spot detection systems – are in all new cars, and not just luxury models, as well as in new federal fleet vehicles. Advocates also support the strong focus on ‘Move Over’ laws and the need for increasing public awareness combined with advancing technological countermeasures. These important provisions will help better protect the heroes on our highways, law enforcement officers and emergency responders.”

The *Protecting Roadside First Responders Act* would establish move over law education and compliance as a national highway safety priority under existing NHTSA programs. This would allow states to apply for grant funding to execute move over law awareness campaigns and to equip vehicles with digital alert and crash avoidance technology.

The digital alert technology, currently deployed by some localities around the country, sends a real-time, audible, hands-free warning to motorists via navigation apps on their smartphone or their in-vehicle navigation system; notifying the driver when they are approaching an emergency responder vehicle. Deploying the technology only requires a small, inexpensive transponder to be added to emergency vehicles.

As of April 2019, 17 Illinois State Police (ISP) squad cars were struck as a result of drivers failing to move over—twice as many as in 2018. Several suffered serious injuries and three of these incidents were fatal. This year, ISP has mourned the loss of Trooper Brooke Jones-Story of Freeport, Trooper Jerry Ellis of Libertyville, and Trooper Christopher Lambert of Highland Park.

Illinois' move over law, called "Scott's Law" was first enacted in 2002 to require motorists to slow down, and when possible, move over for all emergency vehicles with their lights on. It was later expanded in 2017 to include all pulled-over vehicles with their hazard lights on. The law is named after Chicago Fire Department Lt. Scott Gillen, who was killed in 2000 on the Bishop Ford Freeway. In July, Governor Pritzker signed a bill expanding upon the law, which increases the fines for violators and charges them an additional \$250 fee to establish a fund for education and enforcement of the law.

The *Protecting Roadside First Responders Act* would also:

- Require NHTSA to promulgate rules mandating crash avoidance technology on all new motor vehicles, within two years, including automatic emergency braking, forward collision warnings, and lane departure warnings.
- Require all federal fleet vehicles to have crash avoidance technology (automatic emergency braking, forward collision warnings, and lane departure warnings) within five years.
- Require all federal fleet vehicles used for emergency response activities to be equipped with digital alert technology within five years.
- Require research on the efficacy of Move Over laws and related public awareness campaigns as well as recommendations on how to improve these efforts to prevent roadside deaths.

