



Ariz. House votes to repeal new breath-tester requirement

By Jacques Billeaud
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PHOENIX - The Arizona House voted overwhelmingly Thursday to repeal a new requirement forcing first-time drunken driving offenders to install breath-testing ignition interlocks on their vehicles.

The new interlock requirement, signed into law nearly a month ago, hasn't yet taken effect.

State law now requires repeat drunken drivers or those convicted of extreme or aggravated DUI to use interlocks when their driving privileges are restored. The devices won't allow a vehicle to start if the person's alcohol content is above a certain limit.

Some lawmakers said the interlock requirement for first-time offenders needs to be removed because the financial penalties and embarrassment of a drunken driving conviction are probably enough to prevent first-time offenders from making the mistake again. The new law would require the devices for at least a year after drivers get back their driving privileges.

"I don't think there's anybody in this body that wants to go soft on DUI crimes or reward people that are convicted of the crime, but I think many of us believe that we need the proper punishment to fit the crime," said Democratic Rep. Chad Campbell of Phoenix, who voted for dumping the new requirement.

Republican Rep. Eddie Farnsworth of Gilbert, the only House member to vote against the bill, said the proposal would weaken the state's drunken driving laws.

"I do think the punishment fits the crime," Farnsworth said.

The 54-1 vote by the House sends the bill to the Senate.

The drunken driving sentencing bill signed into law by Democratic Gov. Janet Napolitano made Arizona the only state besides New Mexico to have an interlock requirement for first-time drunken driving offenders.

Though the new requirement easily won approval at the Legislature, some lawmakers said at the time that they hoped a special committee would scale back the requirement.

But the bill ultimately became law when the senator who proposed the law said he pulled the plug on

efforts to forge a compromise when it became clear there was no consensus among members of the House.

Several lawmakers in the House said Thursday that they want another shot at a compromise.


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