

The **Association** report

from the **Capitol**

February 23, 2006

Highway worker safety got a big boost in the capitol this week as legislators once again tackled the issue of putting the brakes on dangerous drivers in work zones. On Wednesday morning (Feb. 22) Rep. Neal St. Onge presented his proposal intended to grab the attention of drivers as they go through highway construction and work zones. It is HB1379.

“We’ve got a lot of highway work to do in the next two or three years,” Mr. St. Onge said. “And a majority of that work is rebuilding roads where our construction crews will have to co-exist with traffic.”

Association President Mark O’Dowd testified for the bill and offered an example with which legislators could relate. “If your car needs repairs you take it in to the shop,” he said. “But you can’t do that when highways need repair. We have to send our workers out there and they need help. They need protection and they deserve some respect.”

Don Hillis, MoDOT Director of System Management, spoke in support of the bill and said there would be more than 1,000 work zones in the state this year. Worker safety is critical, he said, adding; “I’ve attended five funerals for MoDOT workers over the past few years and they could have all been avoided.”

HB1379 would create the crime of endangerment of a highway worker with a minimum fine of \$250 for conviction of speeding or passing in a work zone. It also would specify increased fines for conviction by repeat offenders and require jail time for drivers convicted of injuring or killing a highway worker.

Another bill heard Wednesday in the same committee, HB1040, would raise the fine to \$1,000 for conviction of speeding or passing in a work zone. Mr. O’Dowd also testified in favor of this bill on behalf of the Association. Mr. St. Onge said he agreed with a stiffer fine but cautioned that if it were set too high it could jeopardize passage of the bill.

A vote on the bill is expected by the committee in a week or two. A similar bill in the senate, SB872, is No. 6 for debate on the Senate Perfection Calendar.

**From Harry Hill, Lobbyist
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