

## Lawmaker seeks to expand seat belt law

By David White

A review of the 143,994 traffic crashes reported in Alabama in 2005, conducted by the CARE Research & Development Laboratory at the University of Alabama, showed that people who wore seat belts were much less likely to be hurt or killed in crashes.

Of the vehicle occupants involved in crashes, excluding children 3 or younger:

2.7 percent of those who didn't wear seat belts died, compared to 0.1 percent of those who did.

30.1 percent of those who didn't wear seat belts were injured, compared to 10.2 percent of those who did.

67.2 percent of those who didn't wear seat belts were unharmed, compared to 89.7 percent of those who did.

Among all people involved in traffic crashes in Alabama in 2005, 1,134 died and 44,158 were injured, according to the laboratory's "2005 Alabama Traffic Crash Facts."

Joe McInnes, director of the state transportation department, said he supports Moore's bill, since it would encourage more people to wear seat belts.

"We could dramatically reduce fatalities in this state if people wore their seat belts," he said. "This is one way, hopefully, to encourage them to do it."

"It's not Big Brother. It's not big government. It's just common sense," McInnes said.

But Rep. Tommy Sherer, D-Jasper, said, "I just have a problem with telling people that everybody in the car has got to wear a seat belt. I just don't think we need to be legislating something like that, personally." He said current seat-belt requirements are adequate.

The state House of Representatives' Public Safety Committee approved Moore's bill more than a month ago. It has gone nowhere since.

Rep. Ken Guin, D-Carbon Hill, who chairs the agenda-setting House Rules Committee, said he's reluctant to schedule a vote on a bill that could be controversial and prompt delaying tactics by some lawmakers, which could delay other bills.

But Guin said he supports Moore's bill. He said the Rules Committee might put it on the House work agenda, or special order calendar, some time after the next two weeks, after the House debates next year's state budgets and a proposed education bond issue.

"That's one that we're definitely going to look at after we finish with budgets," Guin said.

Moore said, "I'm going to keep trying, to see if we can get it on the special order calendar. If we can't, we'll try it again next year."