

Welcome to Tallahassee and the 14th Annual Freedom Rights Rally

So far, it has been relatively quiet in Tallahassee during this legislative session. Only for one reason, there have been no direct attacks on our rights...

That does not mean we can relax and cool our heels. The session is continuing for nearly four more weeks, and that is plenty of opportunity for a surprise to hit from the rear. We all must watch and listen, and make certain that any hint of suggested lawful changes are immediately reported and dealt with.

It's been somewhat of a roller coaster on the Stiffer Penalties Bills, SB968 and HB1161. The original bills had tough language that to some lawmakers, was unacceptable... but these original writings certainly helped get our point across. Enough so that Representative Planas (R-115) and his staff researched the law, submitted a staff analysis of the present law, and investigated the inconsistencies in application of the present law. The result was an amendment that completely stripped and rewrote HB1161.

Rep. Planas pulled all the serious teeth out of the original House bill and replaced it with a unanimously accepted amendment. Is it what we want – NO...certainly not. It's more like baby step in the right direction by tweaking and strengthening the current laws. What is important, baby steps or not, it's in the right direction. How this will play out is still unknown, but changes in the Senate Bill 968, are bringing this closer to changes that will benefit all victims, including motorcyclist. There is no doubt that more work will be needed in the future.

Virtually nothing has been accomplished in the "distraction" category. Eight or nine bills introduced to restrict or eliminate cell phone use, texting, and electronic communications are all stagnant. Last year I asked everyone to "plant a seed" on these issues and maybe it worked. Three bills last year, nine this year, which shows that our politicians know there are serious problems. Everyone should continue to push for legislation on driver distractions.

Hopefully, the excessive fines for having a vertical license plate will be fixed do to the help of Representative Evers. His amendment on HB1479 changes the wording so that the "original intent" of the law remains, but the horizontal language is removed. Keep in mind that there is still a law restricting vertical tags on any vehicle, but not with the \$1150 fine.

While in Tallahassee, and if you have an opportunity, say a big thanks to Senator Garcia and Representative Evers for their exceptional help this year in pushing our agenda. Both have done an outstanding job and it should be greatly appreciated.

Your participation in the Freedom Ride is an important one and reinforces our positions and agenda to our politicians. Laws are affected when grass-roots organizations become active. Make this your active time in Tallahassee and take good conversational reports back to your Chapters.

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Agenda Summary

Stiffer Penalties

SB968 and HB1161 have been watered down from the original filing, which would not have proceeded in its original language. Mandatory Jail time has been removed. Wording has been changed to include all victims. Existing law has been tweaked to eliminate “may” decisions, force community time and protects the victim or surviving family the right of participation as litigation proceeds. ABATE supports the Senate version of this bill.

Driver Distractions

While several different versions have been filed, both in the Senate and the House, none of them have move forward. ABATE is continuing to push and support the restriction of distractive devices while driving.

Vertical Tag on a Motorcycle

Amendment has been added to HB1479 to allow the original intent, but remove the horizontal requirement. ABATE supports this change in the present law.

Safety and Awareness Funding

Earlier changes in appropriations will have an affect in the availability of funds especially while the State of Florida continues to struggle financially. ABATE is working closely with politicians and departments to insure future use of funding for our programs.