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Lack of Traffic Law Enforcement Putting Lives at Risk

Rep. Sanfelippo vows to introduce legislation to get unsafe drivers off the roads

Madison, Wis. – Reckless driving continues to jeopardize the safety of people across the state, with the Milwaukee area particularly affected: there have recently been numerous serious traffic incidents involving drivers who were operating without a license, with a suspended license, or without required liability insurance. Last week, one such [suspended and uninsured driver recklessly caused a massive pileup on I-94](#) by forcing a tanker truck to swerve across the median and striking another semi-truck with enough force to flip it, shutting down the interstate for hours. Late last month, [a man struck two young boys, ages 4 and 6, along the side of the road and fled the scene](#). The suspect charged in the case has never had a driver license, yet had previously been cited at least six times for unlicensed driving and twice for being uninsured. Earlier this year, a Milwaukee Department of Public Works employee Bryan Rodriguez died after a car struck him while he was filling potholes. The driver, who fled the scene, despite also never having possessed a valid driver license, had [previously been cited a staggering 31 times for driving without a license](#).

Representative Joe Sanfelippo (R–New Berlin) has grown frustrated with the danger caused by reckless drivers in Wisconsin: “What we have now is countless drivers on Wisconsin roads who have either never been issued a license or had their license taken away for good cause. If someone has never shown that they know how to drive or, worse, have demonstrated that they should not be allowed to drive, we need to be making sure that we’re doing everything we can to keep these individuals off of the road because they are a danger to everyone around them. Right now, we are simply doing nothing.”

In Wisconsin, driving without a license, with a suspended license, or without car insurance are all civil offenses. Unless the incident results in serious injury, police can only issue a citation and hope the individual complies. These lax enforcement mechanisms create no disincentives to force violators into compliance: scofflaws know that there are no consequences for ignoring the law. As a result, many unlicensed and uninsured drivers continue to do just that, with some repeat offenders having [over 40 citations for separate instances of unlicensed driving](#). These drivers represent a serious hazard: [19% of fatal car crashes involve at least one invalidly licensed driver and are nearly three times as likely to cause a fatal crash](#).

“Wisconsin is long overdue for a serious overhaul of its traffic laws to address this reckless driving problem. I will be reintroducing legislation I authored in prior sessions to put some teeth behind our unlicensed and uninsured driver laws by significantly stiffening the penalties imposed. More importantly, police will be required to impound the vehicles of repeat offenders until the vehicle is properly registered and the individual claiming it is licensed and insured. We’re finally going to make sure these drivers either learn to drive safely or stay off the roads.”

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The [15th Assembly District](#) includes most of West Allis and the Northern half of New Berlin.