


Law requiring drunk drivers to pay child support if parent is killed passes TN Senate

by JORDAN WHITTINGTON | WZTV Staff

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (WZTV) — Legislation that targets drunk drivers unanimously passed the Tennessee Senate this week.

Bentley's Law aims to hold drunk drivers accountable by requiring them to pay child support if a parent is killed in a wreck.

Under HB 1834/SB 2103, an impaired driver convicted of vehicular homicide will be ordered to pay restitution in the form of child maintenance to each of the victim's children until the kids are 18 years old and graduate high school.

If the defendant is incarcerated and can't pay, the defendant is given one year after their release to begin payments. If the child reaches 18 but hasn't been paid in full, payments will continue until the child is entirely paid, the bill says.

The bill passed the Senate 32-0 on Wednesday.

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Bentley's Law was created by Cecilia Williams, who named the legislation after her 5-year-old grandson. Williams says no amount of money will make up for the loss of life, but hopes the law will lift some financial burdens of kids left without parents.

"It will always be a constant reminder to the offender of what the person's actions have caused," Williams said.

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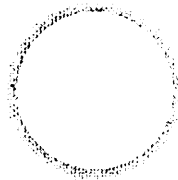
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Push for 'Bentley's Law' to pass in Missouri legislature



There were hearings in both the Missouri Senate and House on Wednesday on "Bentley's Law."

By Shoshana Stahl

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ST. LOUIS, Mo. (First Alert 4) - There were hearings in both the Missouri Senate and House on Wednesday on "Bentley's Law."

Senate Bill 1135 and House Bill 1910 both would require that if a person is convicted of driving while intoxicated and it caused the death of a parent or guardian, a surviving parent or guardian would get payments from the convicted person to support the child.





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Williams said she spends every day honoring her son Cordell Williams, future daughter-in-law Lacey Newton and 4-month-old grandson Cordell Williams II. All three of them were killed in a crash on April 13, 2021 on Highway 30 in Jefferson County.

The driver of the other car was drunk and convicted of 3 counts of involuntary manslaughter.

"I made a promise that day I visited the crash site. I made my son a promise I was not going to allow this to some other family and if I can find a way to create a change and bring awareness, that's what I'm going to do. That's where Bentley's Law is helping with that," Williams said.

According to the bills, the child maintenance payment would start within a year of the person being released from prison and would continue until the child turns 18 or 21 if they are getting secondary education.

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Williams said this would help victims' families tremendously.

"There is one person in particular I spoke to, and the crash that killed her loved one left behind a child. That child had to be put into foster care because she couldn't afford to take care of it. That's not fair," Williams said.

Williams testified in support of the bill on Wednesday to the Senate and House in Jefferson City. Her grandsons Bentley and Mason are now 9 years old and 7 years old.

"Their life is never gonna be the same. They lost their mom and dad and baby brother, who they waited to be born and four months later, he was killed. There's no fairness in that and I don't want any other family to suffer," Williams said.





Sgt. Umfress was the first on scene to that crash in 2021, and he said, unfortunately, he can relate to this in his own life.

"My parents and brother were killed in a crash and I think seeing Mason and Bentley at such a young age, I kind of saw myself. That's one of the things that hit home with me at this crash. I saw so much of myself in those boys and understood exactly what they were going through, losing a parent and a brother in a vehicle crash," Sgt. Umfress said.

Sgt. Umfress said it's important for this bill to pass to hold impaired drivers even more accountable.

"It weighs on us. It weighs on all the first responders. These types of crashes are preventable. If they didn't get behind the wheel impaired, this never would have occurred," Sgt. Umfress said.

Bentley's Law was first introduced in Missouri in 2022, but Williams said each year they have run out of time in the legislative session before getting it over the finish line.

Since then, versions just like this bill have passed in at least six other states, including Tennessee, Texas, Utah, South Dakota, Kentucky and Maine.

Similar bills have also been introduced in over a dozen states across the country.

Williams is hoping 2026 will finally be the year it passes in Missouri.

"This is where they were born. These are the towns they grew up in. We need to get it done here. We need to get it done here for them and every other victim around," Williams said.

If Bentley's Law passes, it would go into effect in August.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving released this statement:

MADD supports Bentley's Law and similar bills that hold drunk driving offenders accountable. Too often, offenders are able to move on with their lives even after killing someone, while victims and survivors are reminded every day of their loss. The idea behind Bentley's Law is to both provide a sense of justice to victims and survivors and make sure offenders are reminded of the heartbreak they caused by making the choice to drive impaired.

