

# High schoolers urge Legislature to toughen DUI laws

Proposed law would give murder charge to drunk drivers who cause deaths

---

Ben Wermund

Daily Texan Staff

[Print this article](#)

[Share this article](#)

---

Published: Wednesday, April 8, 2009

Updated: Wednesday, April 8, 2009



Jeffrey McWhorter/ Daily Texan Staff

---

T.J. Sarkar, 17, president of the Cypress Creek High School Key Club, presents a petition to state Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, to support stricter laws against drunken driving. Ten students from the Key Club made the trip to the Capitol after an eighth grader from the Cypress Creek area was killed by a drunk driver.

Following the death of a middle school girl in December, students from a Houston-area high school presented a petition at the Capitol on Tuesday to strengthen drunken-driving laws.

Ten students holding leadership positions in Cypress Creek High School's Key Club brought their petition to lawmakers to propose Lilly's Law, which was named after Lilly Lalime, a 13-year-old Houston girl who was hit and killed while getting off her school bus.

Lilly's Law would require drunken drivers who cause traffic fatalities to be charged with murder and, if found guilty, given a minimum 15-year sentence.

Jim Wells, principal of Cypress Creek High School, said the trip to Austin allowed the students to experience the political process firsthand.

"It's important for kids to understand we live in a country that has a process so people can affect what happens," Wells said.

The students drafted the petition and collected 1,200 signatures before bringing it to Austin.

"The point behind all of it is public awareness and to influence politicians," Wells said. "Who can argue with a law that protects society and saves lives? That's essentially what the kids were here for."

Angela Collins, a Mothers Against Drunk Driving representative, said the students' goal embodies MADD's message.

"Their whole message is a MADD message," Collins said. "These kids are doing it on their own. They're trying to raise awareness, ask for tougher laws — especially for repeat offenders."

The students, along with Wells and Lalime's parents, were introduced to the House on Tuesday morning and subsequently visited representatives and senators backing bills to increase penalties for drunken-driving offenders.

Three proposed bills advocate installing ignition interlock breathalyzers on the car dashboards of those with previous drunken-driving charges. The device requires a driver to blow a legal blood-alcohol concentration before starting the car.

Wells said similar legislation has been rejected in the past. Harris County, in which Cypress Creek High School is located, issues the highest number of DUIs in the nation, he said.

"Obviously, Texas does not have a good track record," he said. "What's embarrassing is that there is an obvious discrepancy with what's happening here in Texas. The students get it, but adults don't."