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Tougher state DWI laws take effect Friday

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ALBANY — Tougher laws on drunken drivers who have a child in the car take effect Friday.

The new law, known as Leandra's Law, makes it a felony to drive with a blood-alcohol level greater than 0.08 and have a passenger in the car younger than 16. A first offense carries a potential prison sentence of up to four years; up to 15 years if a child passenger is seriously injured; and up to 25 years if a child is killed.

The law was adopted by the state Legislature and signed by Gov. David Paterson last month after Leandra Rosado, 11, died in a drunken-driving accident in October in New York City.

The law also requires drivers charged with drunken driving with a child in the car to surrender their licenses pending prosecution. And if convicted, an ignition-interlock system must be installed in the car for at least six months. On Aug. 15, the law will expand to require the system for any driver convicted of misdemeanor or felony DWI.

The interlock system costs about \$100 to install and \$3 a day to operate. The offender will be required to pay for it.

In 2008, there were 9,202 alcohol-related crashes in New York, according to the state Department of Motor Vehicles. In those crashes, 488 children under the age of 18 were injured or killed.

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