



"I'm just a Bill, yes I'm only a Bill..." Many of us with a few gray hairs beginning to peek out (ok, maybe a little more than a few) will probably start singing in our heads the next line and have fond memories of sitting in front of the TV on a Saturday morning with a bowl of sugar puffs cereal in our laps watching the *Schoolhouse Rock* cartoon video... Come on now, you all know you still remember almost the entire song.

Why is it then that so many here in Florida keep asking "What happened to the "Stiffer Penalties Bill" last year?" To answer that, let me tell you a story (no, not "bout a man named Jed, poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed"... enough childhood memories for now). In the process of telling what happened and what we're planning to do about it, lets also talk about how ABATE of Florida gets Bills for bikers made into law.

First off, the "Stiffer Penalties Bill" from the 2008-2009 FL Legislative Session was designed to even the playing field when comparing car vs. car and car vs. motorcycle accidents and the related penalties to the at-fault driver. In Florida, when a car hits another car, the driver is normally fined \$500. However, when a car hits a motorcycle, the driver would only be fined \$86. How is that fair, especially when car vs. bike accidents are often fatal? Last year, our "Stiffer Penalties Bill" was killed in a hearing by the second committee. What's that mean? Let's go over the whole process:

For an idea to become a law with ABATE of Florida's involvement, Doc Reichenbach, the President and Lobbyist for ABATE of Florida, Inc., will bring up an issue, usually concerning motorcyclists. The ABATE of Florida State Board of Directors and the Chapter Delegates from each of the 32 chapters throughout Florida will meet and discuss this issue, and after talking with each Chapters' Members, make a decision if ABATE of Florida wishes to file a bill to deal with the specific issue. Next, Doc will write up the language of the proposed Bill and then lobby for a State Representative or Senator to "sponsor" it in the Florida Legislature. The Bill will next be filed and numbered, then after the "First Reading", it will usually be referred to the appropriate committees for review. Keep in mind that there are normally many committees our Bill has to go through, almost none of them will meet only once about this Bill, and our Bill can be killed or modified at any of these many hearings. To help prevent our Bill dying a tragic death, Doc goes to testify at these hearings and meet with the Senators or Representatives to help breathe life into it. Doc and Scribe (ABATE of Florida's Legislative Trustee) will then keep an eye on the Bill's activity as it proceeds through these committee and council hearings. Hopefully, our Bill will receive a "favorable" report from these bodies, and if so, it's off for a "Second" and "Third Hearing" before being voted on in the House or Senate. Once it passes that, it's off to begin the same process in the opposite side of State Legislature, and Doc and Scribe have to be at it again.

Once it has successfully navigated through all of this, our Bill now has to be signed by the Governor, who can still Veto it.

Our "Stiffer Penalties Bill" was doing well last year. All of the sudden, the Chairperson of the committee on Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations was not happy with some of the posturing being done with the Bill's timeliness, *NOT AT ALL* the fault of anyone with ABATE of Florida, Inc. This resulted in our Bill dying in committee. The Legislators involved understood the situation, and Doc is again preparing to write another version of the "Stiffer Penalties Bill". It's expected that one of the many Representatives that support us will sponsor this version again.

The description in the 1975 *Schoolhouse Rock* cartoon "I'm Just a Bill" may sound complicated enough, but to get a full understanding of the ENTIRE process an idea takes to become a law in Florida, make sure to download and read the November 2009 *Scribe's Legislative Voice* by visiting www.abateflorida.com, then clicking on the Legislative Information Center link.

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