



State Senator Sheila Harsdorf

Date: February 12, 2014

To: Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

Fr: Senator Sheila Harsdorf

Re: Assembly Bill 636 — snowmobile safety program field training requirements

Dear Chair Ott and Committee Members:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 636 (AB 636), which seeks to place limits on the speed of snowmobiles being used in the optional field training portion of Wisconsin's snowmobile safety program to 15 miles per hour. Representative Severson and I have authored AB 636 in response to a tragic accident that occurred in our districts last fall.

Sarah Thorsland was a 13-year-old girl from Osceola, Wisconsin who tragically lost her life during the field training portion of the snowmobile safety program after the snowmobile she was driving suddenly accelerated to a high speed ending in a collision. At the time of the accident, Sarah was wearing a helmet and her snowmobile was fitted with a kit that places wheels under its front skis to enable it for use on pavement.

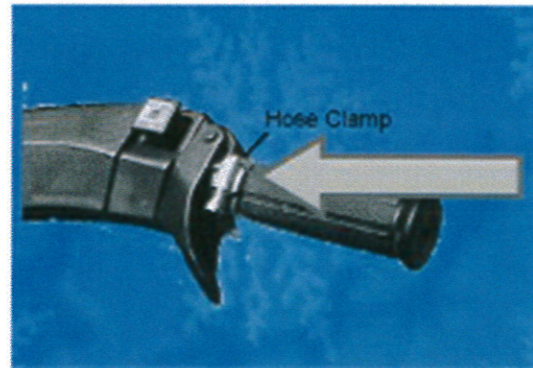
Following this tragedy, it was brought to our attention that Minnesota's snowmobile safety program requires the use of a hose clamp that limits the vehicle to a low speed. The hose clamp physically blocks the throttle to prevent it from accelerating. The clamps are inexpensive, easy to install and remove, reusable, and can be used on any snowmobile. AB 636 seeks to enact a similar requirement here in Wisconsin in an effort to prevent further tragedies from occurring. AB 636 does not mandate the use of a specific hose clamp, but allows for the use of any speed limiting device.

It is important to note that since the tragedy in Osceola, the field training portion of the program has been indefinitely suspended by the Department of Natural Resources. The provisions of AB 636 would apply if and when the DNR lifts the suspension.

I urge your support of AB 636 as a means of enhancing the safety of Wisconsin's snowmobile field training program. Thank you again for holding a hearing on this legislation, and I welcome the opportunity to take questions.

Assembly Bill 636 – requiring a speed-limiting device on snowmobiles during the field training portion of a snowmobile safety program

Below are images of the type of hose clamp that Minnesota requires as a speed-limiting device on snowmobiles during the field training portion of their snowmobile safety program. Note that AB 636 would not require the use of this particular device, but the image below depicts an example of the type of device that could be used to satisfy the requirement created by AB 636.





ERIK SEVERSON

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 28TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Assembly Bill 636 Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

February 12, 2014

I would like to thank Chairman Ott and the members of the committee for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 636. I would also like to thank Sen. Harsdorf for her leadership on this important issue.

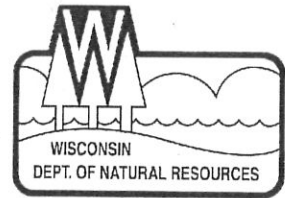
As you know, snowmobile ridership on Wisconsin's trail system has been steadily increasing. In order to ensure proper safety training, any person who was born on or after January 1, 1985 is required to get a snowmobile safety certificate. In general, this is a classroom or online course that provides basic understanding of Wisconsin's snowmobile laws and safety guidelines. In addition, the Department of Natural Resources allows for optional field training courses which seek to give new riders experience on a snowmobile.

Unfortunately, during one of these optional field training courses in my hometown, a 13 year old girl died when her vehicle accelerated unexpectedly. The course was conducted within the guidelines provided by the DNR and the young girl was wearing a helmet as required. However, the guidelines do not specify that there be any protections against these vehicles accelerating at the high speeds they are capable of.

In order to prevent any future tragedies, Assembly Bill 636 would require that any snowmobile being used in one of these courses be equipped with a governor or some other speed limiting device that would restrict the speed of the vehicle to 15mph. This will ensure that field exercise courses are done at slow speeds that allow a new rider to safely begin operating the vehicle.

It is also important to note that at this time the DNR has suspended the field exercise course pending review of the safety guidelines. I believe this is a good program to get new rider acclimated to a snowmobile, but that there need to be restrictions in place on how fast the machine can travel during this training.

Thank you again Chairman Ott and committee members for taking the time to hold this public hearing and I look forward to working with you on passage of this legislation.



2013 ASSEMBLY BILL 636

SNOWMOBILE SAFETY PROGRAM FIELD TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Testimony by: Gary Eddy - ATV and Snowmobile Education Administrator, Dept. of Natural Resources
Appearing for Information Only

Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage
February 12, 2014 10:01 AM
Room: 417 North (GAR Hall)

Good morning Chairman Ott, and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today for information only on Assembly Bill 636.

This bill creates a requirement specific to snowmobiles used during a snowmobile safety education course. Under this legislation, snowmobiles used as part of a field training exercise must be equipped with a device that limits the speed of the snowmobile to 15 miles per hour.

As the authors have described, earlier this winter there was a tragic accident that occurred during a field training course. Following this accident, the Department has made the decision to indefinitely suspend the field portion of the safety course. Even with passage of this legislation, there would still be a few issues that need to be addressed:

- There currently is no simple product available that is specifically designed to limit the speed of all various makes and models of snowmobiles to 15 MPH. This would require the services of a mechanic to make individual modifications to each individual snowmobile along with testing to ensure compliance with this proposed bill.
- The snowmobiles used during field training exercises come from various sources including instructors, DNR wardens, dealerships, students or parents of students. It would not be practical or desirable to manipulate the engines or controls on these machines.

This concludes my written testimony. I would be happy to try and answer any questions you might have.

Related Law:**350.055 Safety certification program established.**

(1) The department shall establish a program of instruction on snowmobile laws, including the intoxicated snowmobiling law, regulations, safety and related subjects. The program shall be conducted by instructors certified by the department. The department may procure liability insurance coverage for certified instructors for work within the scope of their duties under this section.

For each person who is under the age of 16 years, the program shall include 6 hours of classroom instruction, and the instructor may provide to the person up to 2 additional hours of instruction on a snowmobile as to how it is actually operated. Each person satisfactorily completing this program shall receive a snowmobile safety certificate from the department. The department shall establish by rule an instruction fee for this program. An instructor conducting a program of instruction under this section shall collect the instruction fee from each person who receives instruction. The department may determine the portion of this fee, which may not exceed 50%, that the instructor may retain to defray expenses incurred by the instructor in conducting the program. The instructor shall remit the remainder of the fee or, if nothing is retained, the entire fee to the department. The department shall issue a duplicate certificate of accomplishment to a person who is entitled to a duplicate certificate of accomplishment and who pays a fee of \$2.75.

(2) A person who is required to hold a valid snowmobile safety certificate may operate a snowmobile in this state if the person holds a valid snowmobile safety certificate issued by another state or province of the Dominion of Canada and if the course content of the program in such other state or province substantially meets that established by the department under this section.