

Senate approves two bills to toughen drunk driving penalties

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The state Senate signed off today on two bills that would stiffen the penalties for drunk driving, including one that would set a minimum mandatory sentence of five years for those convicted of an OWI homicide.

The bill includes an exception to the five-year minimum if a court finds a compelling reason for a lighter sentence and places its reasons on the record.

The Department of Corrections estimated the bill in its original form would add \$525,1000 annually in agency costs to house additional offenders.

The bill, which cleared on a voice vote, now heads to the gov's desk.

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Meanwhile, the Senate approved a longer mandatory minimum sentence for those convicted of a fifth or sixth offense OWI offense after adding an amendment that would create an exemption to the proposed requirement.

Now, those convicted of a fifth or sixth offenses faces a fine of not less than \$600 and be imprisoned for not less than six months. The bill would allow an exception if the court finds a shorter sentence would be in the best interest of the community, the public wouldn't be harmed and the reasons for the lighter penalty were put on the record.