



From the Desk of

Assemblyman Chris Brown

Trenton should look both ways before abandoning common sense

There is an old proverb which cautions “Take advice, but never abandon the common sense God gave you.” Unfortunately in Trenton, too often common sense is abandoned. Take crossing the street as an example. Only Trenton politicians can take the simple act of crossing the street and turn it into a complicated and more dangerous endeavor.

When I was a boy, my grandmother gave me sound advice about crossing the street: She taught me to check the traffic light, look both ways for cars, and then cross the street only when it’s clear. She explained the reason I should cross the street this way is although I may see the cars, the drivers of the cars may not see me.

A few years ago, Trenton politicians changed the rules on how we all cross the street causing pedestrians to abandon their own common sense. We’ve all seen it - you’re driving down Atlantic Avenue on a beautiful summer day, you have the green light, and as you are almost on top of the intersection, someone strolls out into the street in front of moving traffic with an armload of beach gear, ignoring you and the other on-coming vehicles, causing you to jam on your breaks, praying the vehicle behind you doesn’t rear-end you. As you catch your breath, you watch the pedestrian reach the other side completely oblivious to how close he came to being run over.

My grandmother didn’t need a PhD or a government manual to teach me how to cross the street; she just used her own common sense. Yet, State government has managed to make crossing the street unnecessarily hazardous. So much so, I’ve seen parents jeopardize their children’s safety, under the mistaken belief cars will automatically stop, choosing to stroll into the intersection against the “Don’t Walk” signal while holding their children’s hand instead of waiting a few seconds for the light to turn green. The new law is so absurd jaywalkers, who cross in the middle of the street between two parked cars, now give drivers nasty looks as though the drivers are the ones being careless by breaking the law. Sadly, Trenton’s loss of common sense has encouraged a mindset that pedestrians feel they have an absolute right-of-way, creating a real life version of the arcade game Frogger, but obviously with greater consequences.

Instead of improving safety, New Jersey's new crosswalk law does quite the opposite. Even though the small print of the law says motorist must stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk, "except when the movement of traffic is being regulated by police officers or traffic control signals" and "no pedestrian shall suddenly leave a curb or other place of safety and walk or run into the path of a vehicle which is so close that it is impossible for the driver to yield," pedestrians have developed a false sense of safety to where they feel they have free license to cross the street at any point at any given time, believing vehicles will automatically come to a complete stop for them. The law has made our roadways more dangerous, and the facts bear this out.

Despite the best efforts by the State to raise pedestrian and motorist awareness through multiple agencies and public relations campaigns, the law simply isn't working. According to available State Police records, in the four years after the law took effect (2011- 2014), pedestrians fatalities increased by nearly 10%. Preliminary statistics for 2015 and 2016 show overall pedestrian fatalities are continuing at the same pace. It isn't working because the new law leads pedestrians to believe, against their own common sense, they have no responsibility to insure their own safety.

I believe it's time to return common sense to crossing the street, so I am proposing to restore a healthy dose of caution for pedestrians by repealing the 2010 law. We should return to a time when motorists and pedestrians have to be equally respectful, responsible, and aware of each other.

Unlike the frog in the arcade game who gets many chances, people only get one chance to cross the street safely. I would rather adhere to the proverb and follow the common sense of a grandmother than accept the misguided advice from Trenton politicians.

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