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## **'Move over' law resonates for me** *Off the Cuff*

BY CAROL BROOKS BALL

Typically this space in the Free Press is reserved for editorials, which, by nature, are non-bylined opinion pieces written in third-person, taking a stand on an issue or pointing out an occurrence, on behalf of the newspaper.

However, legislation approved last fall and signed into law by Gov. Deval Patrick a few weeks ago so resonated with me personally that, as the editor of the Free Press, I chose this week to opine with a byline in this very space.

The legislation Gov. Patrick made law in Massachusetts is casually known as the "Move over" law. Its official name is "Senate No. 2103, An Act Relative to Operating a Motor Vehicle When Approaching Stationary Emergency Vehicles." It will go into effect in March and will require that cars, trucks, minivans - you name it - pull over into another lane when they see an emergency vehicle parked on the side of the road ahead of them.

To me, whatever you choose to call the law, it's a no-brainer. As many readers know, my young daughter became suddenly seriously ill last year (9 months ago to be exact, but who's counting?). I'm pleased to say that she's doing quite well now, but at the onset of her illness, we experienced three separate, traumatic ambulance rides from our home on the North Shore to a hospital in Boston.

There's nothing quite so terrifying as riding in the back of an ambulance with your sick child as you desperately try to read every nuance on the faces of the EMTs and paramedics as the ambulance hurtles down the roadway. Perhaps just as terrifying, however, is the desperate need to Get to the Hospital NOW, only to encounter bumper-to-bumper traffic on Rt. 1 South, the Tobin Bridge or Storrow Drive, in our case.

On our first ambulance trip, my heart sank when I saw the traffic ahead of us and felt the

ambulance driver begin to slow the vehicle.

However, as soon as the driver turned on the vehicle's emergency lights and siren, the sight I beheld literally brought me to tears: Almost every car, truck and van ahead of us as far as the eye could see did the right thing - they pulled over and let us pass. As I sat there and quietly wept, the emergency workers misunderstood my tears, and began assuring me that medical staff at the hospital's emergency department knew our arrival was imminent and were standing by to care for my daughter.

While that certainly was foremost on my mind, I remember wiping my tears and nose with the back of my hand, and explaining to them that I was crying out of sheer gratitude that so many drivers ahead of us - complete and utter strangers to me and my daughter, and people whom we would never meet - had shifted their vehicles out of our way.

It's as if they were wishing us Godspeed.

Thankfully, we never had to pull over to the side of the road, cowering in hope that vehicles flying by us wouldn't slam straight into the back of the ambulance. Thanks to this new state law, however, had we done so, other drivers on the roadway would have had a legal obligation, not to mention moral, to veer out of our way.

The old maxim that "you can't legislate common sense" may be true if we have to have a law in this state about moving over for emergency vehicles. So be it, I say. To those who pulled over for my daughter and me during those harrowing rides, I'd like to publicly say "thank you." And to those who'll begin pulling over, away from ambulances on the side of a highway because it's now the law, again, I say so be it. And may they never have to be the one riding inside the ambulance.

*Carol Brooks Ball is senior editor of the Melrose Free Press.*

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