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# Traffic fine could help disabled

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Friday, March 23, 2007

INDIANAPOLIS - The fine you pay for your next speeding ticket might be a few dollars higher, but advocates for the disabled say the increase ultimately could bring hope to Hoosiers who suffer from spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury.

Tucked deep within the House budget bill is a section creating the state's first spinal-cord and head-injury research fund. Increased fines motorists pay for speeding, driving while intoxicated or other violations would fund the research, conducted in Indiana.

To persuade senators to approve that section in the House budget, a group of Hoosiers in wheelchairs sat outside the state Senate, handing out leaflets and lobbying Thursday.

Greg Bedan, who suffered paralysis in a high school football injury in 1976 but went on to work in state government, noted that the injury-research funds would boost Indiana's life sciences industry.

And research has the potential to help disabled Hoosiers

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re-enter the work force. There's a lot of servicemen coming back with traumatic injuries, not just to the head, but amputees and spinal cord injuries," Bedan said. "It will improve their lives as well."

Butcher was there  
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Indianapolis attorney Janna Shisler, who was injured and paralyzed while an undergraduate in 1979 and went on to earn a law degree, noted that many spinal-cord and

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brain-injury patients live with intense pain

and would benefit from research into pain management.

"If you could get some research that deals with ... muscle manipulation to increase gripping power, maybe then you wouldn't need assistance to pick things up," Shisler said. "There's lots of research that could be conducted to improve the daily lives of people like us."

Derek Deckman, who was injured in an auto accident two weeks before his 18th birthday, was on Medicaid for 10 years until he completed his education and could support himself through employment. Now he is an account representative for a technology firm.

"The biggest challenge is breaking down the stereotype that people with disabilities don't have value to add to the work force," he said.

Although she does not use a wheelchair, Darcy Keith is a survivor of a traumatic brain injury - again, from an auto accident. "We're called the walking wounded," Keith said, because her injury is not immediately apparent to others. She hoped that having a group of disabled advocates lobby for the proposal would register with legislators considering the bill.

The advocates noted motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of spinal cord injuries and of traumatic brain injuries for those ages 16 to 24. Lifetime medical costs for such patients can reach \$2 million, and many end up on Medicaid.

In light of the correlation between certain traffic violations and injuries, the proposal calls for increasing fines by \$18 for speeding, driving while intoxicated, running a red light, and failure to yield, for example. Motorcycle registration fees also would go up by \$10, to \$27, the proposal says.

Together, that would generate an estimated \$19.1 million a year in motor-vehicle fees for the injury research fund.

Indiana University and Purdue University each would get \$500,000 a year for spinal cord and brain injury research. And a nine-member board would screen research projects and award grants from the remaining funds.