



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

January 14, 2021

The Honorable Jon Thorup
The Honorable Wes Breckenridge
The Honorable Shannon Latham
House Agriculture Committee Subcommittee Assignments and Meetings
Iowa Legislature
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Representative Thorup, Representative Breckenridge and Representative Latham:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, law enforcement, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives and reduce costs, urges you to oppose House Study Bill (HSB) 4. This measure will expand an exemption to the state's graduated driver licensing (GDL) law for a special minor's driver's license to permit 14.5 year-old novice drivers to drive unsupervised up to 50 miles between destinations if they live or work on a farm and will remove a restriction preventing applicants who live within one mile of their school from qualifying. This measure would weaken Iowa's current GDL law and threaten the safety of novice teen drivers and all who share the roads with them.

American teenagers drive less than all but the oldest drivers, yet their number of crashes and crash deaths are disproportionately high.ⁱ Per mile driven, even older drivers aged 16 to 19 are three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash.ⁱⁱ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), teens are more likely than older drivers to misjudge dangerous situations or not be able to recognize hazardous situations. Teens tend to speed, follow too closely, and underestimate speed and stopping distances. Moreover, compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. In addition to preventing fatalities and injuries, GDL laws save states money. Nationally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates the economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old is \$40.8 billion. In Iowa, all motor vehicle crashes cost the state nearly \$2.2 billion annually (NHTSA).

Based on research, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has identified the current best practices in the United States for novice drivers to include a minimum permit age of 16 and a minimum intermediate license age of 17. Delaying the minimum age for obtaining a learner's permit was associated with lower fatal crash rates for 15- to 17-year-olds combined, and a one-year delay (e.g., from age 15 to 16) reduced the fatal crash rate by 13 percent.

Given the proven benefits of strong and comprehensive GDL programs, it is unsurprising that the American public is overwhelmingly supportive. An IIHS survey found that parents favor GDL laws that are as strict as or even stricter than currently exist in any state.ⁱⁱⁱ And, teens agree. Almost three quarters (74 percent) of teens approve of a comprehensive law that incorporates the key elements of GDL including nighttime and passenger restrictions.^{iv}

Over the ten year period of 2010 to 2019, 3,462 people died on Iowa's roads (NHTSA). Exemptions to permit students to drive to school already exist in Iowa's GDL law. The law should not be further weakened by adding more exemptions and complicating enforcement efforts.

This week, Advocates released its 2021 *Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws* (Roadmap Report); a copy of it follows this letter. The goal of the Roadmap Report is to encourage states to enact proven laws to improve traffic safety, and with a “yellow” rating indicating the state needs improvement, Iowa has ample opportunities to do so.

At a time when our Nation is struggling with the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 and early estimates for the first three quarters of 2020 show that traffic fatalities and the traffic fatality rate have increased (NHTSA), we ask you to reject HSB 4. Instead, advance measures to protect road users and keep them out of overly burdened emergency rooms and hospitals as well as curb the expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase
President

cc: The Honorable Russ C. Paustian, Chair, House Agriculture Committee
The Honorable Chad Ingels, Vice Chair, House Agriculture Committee
The Honorable Kenan Judge, Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee
House Agriculture Committee Members

encl: *Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws*

ⁱ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. 2013. [Unpublished analysis of 2008 data from the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Household Travel Survey, General Estimates System, and Fatality Analysis Reporting System].

ⁱⁱ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). Fatality facts: Teenagers 2017.

<http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/teenagers/fatalityfacts/teenagers>.

ⁱⁱⁱ IIHS, Status Report, Vol. 45, No. 7, August 3, 2010, *Parents favor strict rules for teen drivers and higher licensing age*. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1SQweG1>.

^{iv} Williams, AF, op. cit.