



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
& AUTO SAFETY

May 16, 2022

The Honorable Chris R. Holden, Chair  
The Honorable Frank Bigelow, Vice Chair  
Assembly Committee on Appropriations  
California State Legislature  
1021 O Street, Room 1100  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Chair Holden and Vice Chair Bigelow:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical, law enforcement and public health groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries and curb costs, supports enactment of Assembly Bill (AB) 2388. This legislation will improve the current graduated driver licensing (GDL) law for novice young drivers by requiring participation in the state's program by older teen and young adult novice drivers up to age 21. California law only covers teenagers up to age 18, leaving other at-risk young novice drivers, and all those who share the roads with them, unnecessarily exposed to a high risk of preventable crashes.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading killer of teens in California as well as across the United States.<sup>i</sup> On average, nearly twelve people were killed in the United States each day of 2019 as a result of motor vehicle crashes involving a young driver. That year, 4,356 people were killed in crashes involving young drivers (aged 15 - 20); 1,603 were young drivers and 880 were passengers of young drivers. The remaining 1,873 victims were non-occupants and the occupants of the other vehicles involved in crashes with young drivers.<sup>ii</sup> Additionally, 205,000 young drivers were injured in motor vehicle crashes in 2019.<sup>iii</sup> The estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving young drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$40.8 billion (2002).<sup>iv</sup> When adjusted for inflation only, these costs amount to \$60 billion in 2020 dollars.<sup>v</sup>

Unfortunately, this preventable toll is worsening. According to the *National Roadway Safety Strategy*, traffic fatalities among ages 16 – 24 increased 15 percent in 2020 over 2019. In comparison, the overall increase in traffic fatalities in 2020 was 7.2 percent, less than half of that experienced by the teen and young adult age group.<sup>vi</sup> Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) finds that fatal crashes involving young drivers 15 to 20 years old increased by 14 percent from 3,863 in 2019 to 4,405 in 2020.<sup>vii</sup>

Speeding, lack of seat belt use and impaired driving have been noted as the leading contributors to consecutive increases in traffic fatalities over the past couple of years. Media reports note that distracted driving, a major contributor to crashes, is on the rise as well. Among teens surveyed in 2019 for risky driving behaviors, 43 percent reported not always wearing a seat belt, 39 percent reported texting or emailing while driving and 17 percent had ridden at least once during the previous month with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.<sup>viii</sup>

AB 2388 is timely legislation to help curb traffic fatalities as a significant number of teens today are delaying obtaining a driver's license and, consequently, are not benefitting from GDL programs according to research by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CHOP CIRP) and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. This research found that, "only 44 percent of respondents reported that they obtained a driver's license within 12 months of the minimum age for licensing in their state, and only 54 percent reported that they obtained a license before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday."<sup>ix</sup>

Aging out of GDL is a problem because drivers who begin the licensing process at age 18, 19 or 20 still have a high crash risk due to inexperience and brain development.<sup>x</sup> As a result, older teen novice drivers are missing out on, yet still very much need, the safety benefits of GDL programs.<sup>xi</sup> A study showed that while GDL programs have likely contributed to a significant decline in teen driver crashes over the decade of 2005 – 2014, the improvements are not as strong for 18 – 20 year olds who have aged out of GDL.<sup>xii</sup> Further, a new study from CHOP CIRP found that, “drivers who were licensed at age 18, making them exempt from comprehensive licensing requirements, had the highest crash rates in the first year of licensure of all those licensed under the age of 25.”<sup>xiii</sup>

GDL laws also save states money by reducing crashes. In California, all motor vehicle crashes cost the state more than \$24 billion annually, when adjusted for inflation.<sup>xiv</sup> AB 2388 will help curb the preventable crashes and related costs.

The American public overwhelmingly supports GDL programs. According to a survey by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), parents favor GDL laws that are as strict as or even stricter than currently exist in any state. They also approve of older ages for licensure; in fact, 64 percent chose age 18 or older for a full license.<sup>xv</sup> And, almost three quarters (74 percent) of teens approve of a comprehensive law that incorporates the key elements of GDL including nighttime and passenger restrictions.<sup>xvi</sup>

Teens delaying licensing has resulted in an unintended loophole that needs to be closed by including older teen and young adult novice drivers in the GDL program. We commend you for considering this measure and urge the Committee to swiftly advance AB 2388.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase  
President

cc: Assembly Committee on Appropriations Members

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- <sup>i</sup> WISQARS: Leading Causes of Death Reports, 1999-2020, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED), ages 13-19, All-Deaths and Unintentional Injuries, available at <https://webappa.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>, accessed May 16, 2022.
- <sup>ii</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: 2019 Data, Young Drivers, NHTSA, Jun. 2021, DOT HS 813 130 available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813130>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Id.
- <sup>iv</sup> Traffic Safety Facts 2002: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 809 619, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/809619>.
- <sup>v</sup> CPI Inflation Calculator, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).
- <sup>vi</sup> Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2020, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 813 118, June 2021.
- <sup>vii</sup> Overview of Motor Vehicle Crashes in 2020, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 266, March 2022. Available here: <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813266>
- <sup>viii</sup> Transportation Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2019
- <sup>ix</sup> Timing of Driver’s License Acquisition and Reasons for Delay among Young People in the United States, 2012, AAA Foundation for Safety, Jul. 2013, available at <http://newsroom.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Teens-Delay-Licensing-FTS-Report.pdf>
- <sup>x</sup> Mission Not Accomplished: Teen Safe Driving the Next Chapter, GHSA, October 2016, available at [https://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/FINAL\\_TeenReport16.pdf](https://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/FINAL_TeenReport16.pdf).
- <sup>xi</sup> Id.
- <sup>xii</sup> Id.
- <sup>xiii</sup> CHOP News, “Study Suggests Policy, Education and Training Make Youngest Novice Drivers Better Prepared for License Exam, Less Likely to Crash”, April 25 2022. Available at: <https://www.chop.edu/news/study-suggests-policy-education-and-training-make-youngest-novice-drivers-better-prepared>
- <sup>xiv</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2010 (Revised), NHTSA, DOT HS 812 013, May 2015 (revised), available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812013>
- <sup>xv</sup> 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/1SQweGI>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Williams, AF, op. cit.