



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

June 2, 2022

Assemblymember Chris Holden, Chair
Assembly Appropriations Committee
California State Legislature
1021 O Street, Suite 5650
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Chair Holden:

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 injury, and curb costs, supports Assembly Bill (AB) 2388. We urge you to support allowing a Senate bill to be amended to include the bill language and to advance this critical measure.

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.ⁱ Unfortunately, this tragic toll is worsening. 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.ⁱⁱ New traffic fatality estimates for 2021 find that overall traffic fatalities increased again, nearly 40,000 people were killed across the country.

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.ⁱⁱⁱ As a result, older teen novice drivers are missing out on, yet still very much need, the safety benefits of GDL programs.^{iv} 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.^v Further, a new study from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention 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."^{vi}

With motor vehicle crash fatalities having risen in California by 10.7 percent from 2020 to 2021 (totaling 4,258 deaths),^{vii} it is a critical time to make proven, commonsense improvements to traffic safety laws. 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 urge you to make this lifesaving improvement.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

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- ⁱ 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.
- ⁱⁱ 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>
- ⁱⁱⁱ 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.
- ^{iv} Id.
- ^v Id.
- ^{vi} 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>
- ^{vii} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, April). Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2021 (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 283). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.