



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

February 24, 2023

The Honorable Ben Allen
California State Senate
1021 O St., Suite 6610
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Senator Allen:

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 Senate Bill (SB) 473. This critically needed legislation will improve California's graduated driver licensing (GDL) law by requiring older teen and young adult novice drivers up to age 21 to participate in the state's GDL program. Current law only covers teenagers up to age 18, leaving other young novice drivers and all those who share the roads with them unnecessarily exposed to a high risk of motor vehicle crashes.

In the first nine months of 2022, 3,178 people were killed as a result of traffic crashes in California.ⁱ These crashes are not only deadly – they are also a weighty financial burden; the total cost of crashes in the state has surpassed \$29 billion annually.ⁱⁱ These alarming statistics underscore the need for decisive legislative action to address motor vehicle crash incidence and associated fatalities in California.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading killer of teens in the U.S. The number of fatal crashes involving young drivers in 2020 was the highest recorded over the course of the 2011-2020 time period, and a staggering 14 percent increase from just the previous year.ⁱⁱⁱ In California, fatalities in crashes involving young drivers accounted for more than 11 percent of all 2020 traffic fatalities.^{iv}

According to research by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, teens are delaying obtaining a driver's license and, as a consequence, are not benefitting from GDL programs. 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 18th birthday."^v The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has noted that the number of licensed young drivers decreased by nearly five percent from 2019 to 2020.^{vi}

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 continuing brain development.^{vii} As a result, older teen and young adult novice drivers still need the lower risk setting and experience provided by a comprehensive GDL program. A recent 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."^{viii}

Extending California's current GDL program will help to ensure that young novice drivers are introduced to the driving experience gradually, in order to gain necessary skill and instill a lifetime of safe driving behaviors. Advocates strongly supports SB 473 to include older teen and young adult novice drivers in the state's GDL program and close an unintended loophole in the state's GDL law.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

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- ⁱ Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities for the First 9 Months (January–September) of 2022, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), DOT HS 813 406, Dec. 2022, available at: <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813406>
- ⁱⁱ The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised), NHTSA, DOT HS 813 403, Feb. 2023, available at: <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 313, June 2022, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813313>
- ^{iv} Traffic Safety Facts: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 313, June 2022, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813313>
- ^v 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>
- ^{vi} Traffic Safety Facts: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 313, June 2022, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813313>
- ^{vii} Mission Not Accomplished: Teen Safe Driving the Next Chapter, Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), October 2016, available at <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/teendriving16>.
- ^{viii} 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 <https://aaafoundation.org/timing-drivers-license-acquisition-reasons-delay-among-young-people-united-states-2012>