



March 29, 2023

The Honorable Brenden H. Jones, Chair
The Honorable Jeffrey C. McNeely, Chair
The Honorable Phil Shephard, Chair
The Honorable Steve Tyson, Chair
House Committee on Transportation
North Carolina General Assembly
16 West Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

Dear Chair Jones, Chair McNeely, Chair Shephard and Chair Tyson:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) is an alliance of consumer, safety, law enforcement, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies and agents working to advance laws proven to prevent crashes, deaths and injuries on our roads and contain related costs. We urge you to oppose Senate Bill (SB) 157 to weaken requirements of the current graduated driver licensing (GDL) law which would imperil the safety of novice teen drivers and all who share the roads with them.

During the first nine months of 2022, North Carolina recorded 1,238 traffic fatalities according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).ⁱ In 2020, the most recent year that full data is available from NHTSA, 191 drivers aged 15 – 20 were involved in fatal crashes. This is a 24 percent increase over the prior year. Traffic crashes also impose a tremendous economic impact on the state and its residents. Traffic crashes in North Carolina have surpassed \$12 billion, amounting to a \$1,148 “crash tax” on every resident.ⁱⁱ Clearly, this serious and costly issue in the state should be improved, not worsened by weakening a proven traffic safety law.

American teenagers drive less than all but the oldest drivers, yet their number of crashes and crash deaths are disproportionately high.ⁱⁱⁱ Per mile driven, teen drivers aged 16 to 19 are three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash.^{iv} 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, underestimate speed and stopping distances, and are less likely to buckle up.

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 intermediate license age of 17.^v The minimum intermediate license age in North Carolina is only sixteen but follows a twelve-month limited learner license period. The learner period is the safest time for novice drivers, supervised by a licensed adult, while they gain skills and confidence to drive independently and responsibly. This is also the stage in which the supervising adult has an opportunity to help instill lifetime safe driving behaviors. Unfortunately, SB 157 seeks to reduce the critical learner’s period from 12 to nine months, significantly shortening this vital period.

We ask you to reject SB 157. Instead, we urge you to advance measures to protect road users and curb the expenditure of residents’ dollars on associated costs. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

cc: House Committee on Transportation Members

ⁱ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, December). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities for the first 9 months (January–September) of 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 406). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

ⁱⁱ Blincoe, L., Miller, T., Wang, J.-S., Swedler, D., Coughlin, T., Lawrence, B., Guo, F., Klauer, S., & Dingus, T. (2022, December). *The economic and societal impact of motor vehicle crashes, 2019* (Report No. DOT HS 813 403). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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].

^{iv} Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). Fatality facts: Teenagers 2017. <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/teenagers/fatalityfacts/teenagers>.

^v IIHS, Topics, Teenagers. Available at: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/teenagers>