



April 13, 2023

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino, Chair
The Honorable Brian W. Jones, Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 412
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Chair Portantino and Vice Chair Jones:

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 support 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.

New data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) finds that in 2021 traffic fatalities in California (4,285 people killed) increased nearly eight percent over 2020.ⁱ In the first nine months of 2022, an estimated 3,178 people were killed as a result of traffic crashes in the state.ⁱⁱ Motor vehicle crashes are a leading killer of teens in the U.S. and California.ⁱⁱⁱ The number of young drivers (aged 15 to 20) involved in fatal crashes in 2021 in California (474) was the highest recorded over the course of the 2012-2021 time period, and a staggering 15 percent increase from the previous year.^{iv}

These crashes are not only deadly – they are also a weighty financial burden. Updated data from NHTSA identifies that the total value of societal harm from motor vehicle crashes in 2019 was nearly \$1.4 trillion (this includes economic costs of \$340 billion plus quality of life valuations).^v Congestion caused by crashes accounted for \$36 billion and includes resultant greenhouse gases and pollutants.^{vi} The total cost of crashes in the state has surpassed \$29 billion annually which amounts to \$736 in costs to every resident.^{vii} These alarming statistics underscore the need for decisive legislative action to address motor vehicle crash incidence and associated fatalities in California.

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."^{viii} The NHTSA has noted that the number of licensed young drivers decreased by nearly five percent from 2019 to 2020, yet the number of young drivers involved in fatal crashes increased by 14 percent during that time period.^{ix}

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.^x 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."^{xi}

Extending California's GDL program will help to ensure that all 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. Doing so will curb preventable crashes and their impacts including fatalities, injuries, congestion and costs.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase, President

cc: Senate Appropriations Committee Members

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- ⁱ Stewart, T. (2023, April). Overview of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2021 (Report No. DOT HS 813 435). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
 - ⁱⁱ 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>
 - ⁱⁱⁱ NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts California 2012 – 2021. Available at <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm#>
 - ^{iv} NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts California 2012 – 2021. Available at <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm#>
 - ^v 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
 - ^{vi} 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
 - ^{vii} 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>
 - ^{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 <http://newsroom.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Teens-Delay-Licensing-FTS-Report.pdf>
 - ^{ix} Traffic Safety Facts: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 313, June 2022, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813313> and National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, June). Young drivers: 2020 data (Traffic Safety Facts. Report No. DOT HS 813 313). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
 - ^x Mission Not Accomplished: Teen Safe Driving the Next Chapter, Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), October 2016, available at <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/teendriving16>.
 - ^{xi} 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>