



April 24, 2023

The Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of North Carolina
Office of the Governor
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-0301

Dear Governor Cooper:

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 veto Senate Bill (SB) 157 which will weaken requirements of the current graduated driver licensing (GDL) law and imperil the safety of novice teen drivers and all who share the roads with them.

North Carolina recorded 1,663 traffic fatalities in 2021, a more than eight percent increase over 2020, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).ⁱ That year, 192 drivers aged 15 – 20 were involved in fatal crashes.ⁱⁱ Traffic crashes also impose a tremendous economic impact on the state and its residents. The cost of traffic crashes in North Carolina have surpassed \$12 billion, amounting to a \$1,148 “crash tax” on every resident.ⁱⁱⁱ Clearly, this serious and costly issue should be remedied, 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.^{iv} 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.^v 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.^{vi} 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.

Especially as we approach high school prom and graduation season, we ask you to reject SB 157 and better protect teenagers and all road users. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

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 NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts North Carolina 2012-2021. Available here: <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm#>

ⁱⁱⁱ Blincoc, 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.

^{iv} 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].

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

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