



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
& AUTO SAFETY

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Pat Grassley, Speaker  
The Honorable John H. Wills, Speaker Pro Tempore  
The Honorable Matt W. Windschitl, Majority Leader  
Iowa House  
Iowa Legislature  
1007 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Speaker Grassley, Speaker Pro Tempore Wills, and Majority Leader Windschitl:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical, public health and law enforcement groups and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs, urges you to oppose Senate File (SF) 2109/House File (HF) 2463. This measure will expand an exemption to the graduated driver licensing (GDL) law for a special minors' restricted license and increase the number of inexperienced and unsupervised drivers as young as age 14 on state roads. In doing so, it will weaken the current GDL law and threaten the safety of novice teen drivers and all who share the roads with them.

In the U.S., teenagers drive less than all but the oldest drivers, yet their number of crashes and crash deaths are disproportionately high.<sup>i</sup> Per mile driven, teen drivers have crash rates nearly four times higher than drivers aged 20 and older.<sup>ii</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), teens are more likely than older drivers to misjudge dangerous situations or to not be able to recognize hazardous situations. Teens tend to speed, follow too closely, and underestimate speed and stopping distances. Moreover, compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use.

In addition to preventing fatalities and injuries, GDL laws save states money. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates the economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old in the U.S. is \$40.8 billion according to a 2002 analysis.<sup>iii</sup> When adjusted for inflation only, these costs amount to \$68.92 billion in 2023 dollars.<sup>iv</sup> In Iowa, all motor vehicle crashes cost the state nearly \$2.8 billion - essentially resulting in a "crash tax" of \$885 on each Iowa resident.<sup>v</sup>

This legislation also would allow novice drivers to drive an hour before and after permitted activities such as work instead of retaining the current prohibition on drivers operating under a special minors' restricted license that limits driving to between 5 am and 10 pm. Nighttime driving is restricted for novice drivers for a reason; it is very dangerous. Research and data find 19 percent of fatalities of teenage drivers occur between 9 pm and midnight.<sup>vi</sup> The bill also would let the special license holder identify three residences and drive within a 25-mile radius of each one. These changes will make enforcement of the nighttime driving restriction and mileage restrictions particularly challenging if not impossible.

Based on research, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has identified the current best practices in the U.S. for novice drivers to include a minimum permit age of 16 and a minimum intermediate license age of 17. Delaying the minimum age for obtaining a learner's permit was associated with lower fatal crash rates for 15- to 17-year-olds combined, and a one-year delay (e.g., from age 15 to 16) reduced the fatal crash rate by 13 percent.<sup>vii</sup> Rather than further exacerbate the dangers associated with teen driving by expanding the number of very young teen drivers, we urge you to instead consider making these changes to upgrade safety.

Over the ten-year period of 2012 to 2021, 3,410 people died on Iowa's roads.<sup>viii</sup> Exemptions to permit students to drive to school, extracurricular activities, and farm work already exist in Iowa's GDL law. The law should not be weakened by adding more exemptions and complicating enforcement efforts. We urge you to reject SF 2109/HF 2463.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase  
President

cc: House leadership team

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- <sup>i</sup> 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].
- <sup>ii</sup> Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), Teenagers, available at <https://www.iihs.org/topics/teenagers#by-the-numbers>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Traffic Safety Facts 2002: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 809 619, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/809619>.
- <sup>iv</sup> CPI Inflation Calculator, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>; Based on Jan. 2002 to Jan. 2023 value.
- <sup>v</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Feb. 2023, DOT HS 813 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Fatality Facts 2021: Teenagers website, available at <https://www.iihs.org/topics/fatality-statistics/detail/teenagers>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Graduated Licensing Laws and Fatal Crashes of Teenage Drivers: A National Study, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, June 2010, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20544567/>.
- <sup>viii</sup> State Traffic Safety Information for Iowa (2021), NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/stsi.htm>.