



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

March 7, 2024

The Honorable Haraz N. Ghanbari, Chair
The Honorable Phil Plummer, Vice Chair
House Homeland Security Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chair Ghanbari and Vice Chair Plummer:

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 House Bill (HB) 395. This measure will reduce the minimum driving age by six months to 15 years old and increase the number of inexperienced drivers on state roads. In doing so, it will weaken the graduated driver licensing (GDL) law and threaten the safety of novice teen drivers and all who share the roads with them.

Teenagers drive less than all but the oldest drivers, yet their number of crashes and crash deaths are disproportionately high.ⁱ Per mile driven, teen drivers have crash rates nearly four times higher than drivers aged 20 and older.ⁱⁱ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), teens are more likely 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) estimated the economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old in the U.S. was \$40.8 billion in 2002.ⁱⁱⁱ When adjusted for inflation, that amounts to \$71.1 billion in 2024 dollars.^{iv} The annual cost of traffic crashes in Ohio have surpassed \$12 billion – amounting to a “crash tax” of \$1,036 on each Ohioan according to a 2019 analysis.^v

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety’s (IIHS) GDL Crash Reduction Calculator estimates that if Ohio reduces the minimum driving age to 15, fatal crashes would increase by seven percent and total collision claims by two percent.^{vi} 1,354 people lost their lives on Ohio roads in 2021, a 21 percent increase since 2012.^{vii} Traffic safety is a serious issue that requires improvement rather than the weakening of the state’s GDL law.

HB 395 increases the temporary instruction permit validity period by six months and requires that it be held for a year, an increase of six months, before a driver can be eligible for a probationary license. We support these changes but not in a context where the minimum driving age is decreased by six months. Based on IIHS research, the best practices for GDL 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.^{viii} Rather than exacerbate the dangers associated with teen driving we urge you to instead consider making these changes to upgrade safety.

With well over 1,000 annual traffic fatalities in Ohio, we urge you to reject HB 395. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Kurdock, General Counsel

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- i 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].
- ii Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), Teenagers, available at <https://www.iihs.org/topics/teenagers#by-the-numbers>.
- iii Traffic Safety Facts 2002: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 809 619, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/809619>.
- iv CPI Inflation Calculator, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>; Based on Jan. 2002 to Jan. 2024 value.
- v 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>.
- vi IIHS. GDL Crash Reduction Calculator available at: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/teenagers/gdl-calculator>.
- vii State Traffic Safety Information for Ohio (2021), NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/stsi.htm>.
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/>.