



May 3, 2024

The Honorable Buffy Wicks, Chair
The Honorable Kate A. Sanchez, Vice Chair
Assembly Committee on Appropriations
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Chair Wicks and Vice Chair Sanchez:

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 enactment of Assembly Bill (AB) 2385. This critically needed legislation will improve California's graduated driver licensing (GDL) law by requiring participation by older teen and young adult novice drivers up to age 21. 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.

In 2022, 4,428 people were killed in traffic crashes in California, a 48 percent increase in nearly a decade.^{i 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}

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.^v When adjusted for inflation only, these costs amount to \$71.1 billion in 2024 dollars.^{vi} Further, young drivers have the largest proportion of drivers in fatal crashes who were distracted at the time of the crash.^{vii} Crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted imposed an economic cost of \$98.2 billion in 2019.^{viii} Adjusted for inflation only, that amounts to \$120.3 billion in 2024 dollars.^{ix} In 2018, distracted driving crashes cost employers nearly \$19 billion.^x

The aggregate costs of motor vehicle crashes are even greater. 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).^{xi} The total cost of crashes in the state has surpassed \$29 billion annually which amounts to \$736 in costs to every resident.^{xii} These alarming figures underscore the need for decisive legislative action to address motor vehicle crashes and fatalities in California.

According to research by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CHOP) 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."^{xiii}

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.^{xiv} 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 CHOP 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.”^{xv} A report released by the Governors Highway Safety Association found that “studies support states extending GDL to 18- to 20-year olds.”^{xvi}

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 skills and instill a lifetime of safe driving behaviors. Advocates strongly supports AB 2385 to curb preventable crashes and their significant and serious impacts.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase, President

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- ⁱ NHTSA. (2024). Overview of Motor Vehicle Crashes in 2022. U.S. Department of Transportation, available [here](#).
- ⁱⁱ California Traffic Safety Quick Stats — 2013. California Office of Traffic Safety, available at <https://www.ots.ca.gov/ots-and-traffic-safety/score-card-2013/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts California 2012 – 2021. Available at <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm#>.
- ^{iv} *Ibid.*
- ^v Traffic Safety Facts 2002: Young Drivers, NHTSA, DOT HS 809 619, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/809619>.
- ^{vi} CPI Inflation Calculator, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>; Based on Jan. 2002 to Jan. 2024 value.
- ^{vii} Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Distracted Driving 2021, May 2023, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 443, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813443>.
- ^{viii} The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Feb. 2023, DOT HS 812 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.
- ^{ix} Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, available at https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm; Jan. 2019 value compared to Jan. 2024 value.
- ^x Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019, NETS, 2018 data expressed in 2019 \$, available at <https://trafficsafety.org/?ddownload=26813>.
- ^{xi} 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.
- ^{xii} 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>.
- ^{xiii} 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>.
- ^{xiv} Mission Not Accomplished: Teen Safe Driving the Next Chapter, Governors Highway Safety Association, October 2016, available at <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/teendriving16>.
- ^{xv} CHOP News, “Study Suggests Policy, Education and Training Make Youngest Novice Drivers Better Prepared for License Exam, Less Likely to Crash”, April 25, 2022. Available at: <https://www.chop.edu/news/study-suggests-policy-education-and-training-make-youngest-novice-drivers-better-prepared>.
- ^{xvi} Young Drivers and Traffic Fatalities: 20 Years of Progress on the Road to Zero, Governors Highway Safety Association, October 2023, available at <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/GHSA/young-drivers-spotlight-report23>.