SENATE EDUCATION
EXHIBIT NO. 7
DATE 3-2-05
BILL NO. SB-496

Testimony

Bill Number: SB496
Bill Subject: Enhance statewide driver education programs for novices and seniors
Sponsor: Sen. Mike Cooney
Pro/Opp/Info: Proponent
Committee: Senate Education and Cultural Resources
Chairperson: Sen. Don Ryan, Great Falls
Meeting Info: March 2, 2005 3:00 PM Room 303

Testimony

Chairperson Ryan and Members of the Committee, for the record my name is Rick Chiotti. I am here on behalf of Superintendent Linda McCulloch in support of SB496.

Although SB496 is not a bill that was requested by OPI, the Office stands in support of the bill. Besides establishing funding and authority for an education program for senior driver education, SB496 raises revenue to restore the historical levels of reimbursement to schools for novice driver education.

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s state reimbursements to schools for driver education was at or above 50% of the average cost for a local program, and over 90% of the eligible teens participated in driver education. Since about 1994 state reimbursement to local programs has slipped to under 25% of the average costs of delivering a local program. During that same time, the participation of eligible teens has dropped to about 70%.

As the state reimbursement has covered less of the costs associated with local driver education programs, fewer families are able to afford the programs and fewer teens are able to take advantage of novice driver education. In order to make the local programs more accessible to Montana's driving-aged students, OPI requests the committee's support for SB496.

As a resource to the Committee, David Huff, the director of traffic education programs in the Office of Public Instruction, is here today and is available to answer questions.

Thank you.