

From: Jim Carroll
Traffic Education Instructor, Conrad High School
Executive Secretary, Montana Traffic Education Association

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Senator Cooney & Committee Members:

I am here today to lend support to SB 496, a bill to enhance statewide driver education programs for novice and senior drivers.

I am a classroom teacher with twenty four years of experience in teaching traffic education. During that time I have seen both strong support by the state for traffic education programs as well as what we currently face.

In the history of the novice program, Montana has reimbursed schools to offset the cost of running a traffic education program. This reimbursement hit a peak of around 50% in the early 1990's and has declined to the current rate of about 25%.

What this has effectively done is created a greater cost to students to take the course, which in too many cases has resulted in students not participating.

Most young people will eventually get their license. I feel that those who receive formal training do a better job than those who do not. We are basically at an all-time low of participants with about 69% of eligible students taking these courses. I feel some of this is due to cost. Local costs to run these programs has risen, but state reimbursement has not kept pace, forcing families with the option of either paying more or choosing not to be properly trained.

What I like about this bill is that it provides a way to bring some of that funding back up to a level that will help local programs keep their costs manageable, at about 50%, which in turn will hopefully keep strong student participation.

The other thing I like about this bill is that it also provides for better funding in regard to our senior drivers. They too can benefit from education and training, especially as our vehicles become more technological and the continued changes to the driving environment.

While I support this bill as an individual teacher, I also represent the support of our state association, the Montana Traffic Education Association. We are a group of educators that support this bill and ask that it be passed.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to address you today and for all of the work you do on behalf of the drivers of Montana.

Jim Carroll