

OPPOSE HB 216 in House Transportation Committee Jan. 26, 3 pm

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Transportation Committee, for your record, I am Jane Hamman –HAMMAN—representing the Montana Traffic Education Association. MTEA is comprised of more than 200 of the professional traffic educators from our local schools. They teach our kids and grandkids to drive safely. They conduct awesome continuing education programs and pay annual dues of \$35 to, among other things, ensure that someone like me represents their highest priorities at the Legislature.

In 2005—some of you will recall, the Legislature passed Montana's graduated driver license law or GDL, after many years of planning and study. The GDL is a three-step program that reduces the risk while new drivers under age 18 develop and improve their driving skills. **Step One - Instruction Permit/Learner's License** requires 6 months and 50 hours of supervised driving practice with a parent or legal guardian. **Step Two - GDL Restricted License - One Year** limits the number of teen passengers and night time driving. **Step Three - Full Privilege Driver's License** after one year of GDL restrictions or age 18.

Traffic educators oppose HB216 because it erodes the protective measures in Montana's GDL. Montana requires six months and 30 – 50 hours of **supervised practice** to develop skills during the critical first months of driving. That's when errors of inexperience and "rookie mistakes" cause the highest lifetime crash risk for teens. Sixteen year olds are three times more likely to die in a car crash than other drivers.

Montana already has "hardship" driver licenses available for teens as young as age 13 provided under 61-5-105, MCA. These restricted licenses reflect our rural culture and are available for **necessity**, not convenience. Upon request, a Department of Justice Motor Vehicle Division Driver Licensing Examiner will contact the parents and the school to determine the necessity for a restricted license. If no supervising driver is available, a restricted hardship license will be issued to drive to and from the school or the school bus stop. Since the GDL was adopted in 2005, there have been 33 hardship licenses issued.

If a hardship license is approved by the Department of Justice, the youth must take and pass both the knowledge and road tests. Then they are given a license restricting them to drive only in the limited area and during the times that were requested and approved.

Because this license is restricted, requirements of the GDL still must be met. When the youth is old enough, he/she may enroll in the program, hold a permit for six months and submit the certification of 50 hours at the end of six months. Or, if they wait until they turn 16, the knowledge test will be waived and they will receive a Learner's License that they must hold for six months and submit the certification of 50 hours at the end of six months. A road test is required unless they were in traffic ed (CDTP) and the instructor waived their road test.

HB 216 is most likely a constituent request from a family who either did not know about the hardship provisions available under current law or was denied a necessity license, most likely because another driver was available. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, that is a regrettable situation, but it not a valid reason to amend an already good law and make it into a bad situation that will result in more teen crashes. Please vote **Do Not Pass** on HB 216. Thank You.

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"A teen driver's greatest lifetime chance of crashing occurs in the first 6 to 12 months after receiving a driver license. Lowest lifetime crash risk is during supervised learner period."
(<http://www.research.chop.edu/programs/youngdriver/nyds.php>)

Dr. Laura Stanley of Western Transportation Institute has a pending GDL research proposal which includes:

In 2009, 5,721 teenage drivers in Montana were involved in a motor vehicle crash, 40 of which were fatal (MDT, 2010). Non-fatal crashes often result in property damage and health care costs, while fatal crashes impose an inestimable cost to society. The National Safety Council enumerated the costs of fatal and non-fatal motor vehicle injuries by considering not only the economic loss to a community but also the value of lost quality of life as shown in Table 1 (NSC, 2010):

Table 1. Average Comprehensive Cost by Injury Severity, 2008

Death	\$4,200,000
Incapacitating injury	\$214,200
Non-incapacitating evident injury	\$54,700
Possible injury	\$26,000
No injury	\$2,400

Using these values, the total economic and societal cost of teenage driver fatalities in motor vehicle crashes came to \$168 million last year in Montana. The goal of the GDL program is to reduce crash incidence, fatal and non-fatal.

Sources:

1. Fran Penner-Ray, Traffic Education Programs, www.opi.mt.gov/Programs/Drivered; www.MontanaDRIVE.mt.gov, Montana Office of Public Instruction, (406) 444-4432 Fax 444-2955

2. Kristine Thatcher, Bureau Chief, MVD - Field Operations, Helena, kthatcher@mt.gov