

January 24, 2013

Dear Montana Congress;

As a parent of a new teen driver I want to express my appreciation for the past legislative action that provided the 3-step driver's license privileges for new drivers. Once my son took Drivers Education, I became aware of the grave statistics for new drivers and appreciated the laws that restricted his driving privileges to keep him off the road at night and early morning as well as not allow more than one friend to ride with him. These stipulations meant something much more to him when they came from his Drivers Ed teacher with the law as a back-up rather than had his father and I solely tried to enforce them.

With that in mind, I am urging you to support HB 178 and allow more funding to go toward providing Drivers Education to teenagers. In my own teen years Drivers Education was a part of the high school curriculum and, to my knowledge, every teen took it. Once my son became a teenager, I was surprised at the cost of the program and because of the cost, it was unsettling to see a number of my son's friends not be provided with the training. Examples of this include two young boys who both had unstable home lives and spent time at my house during the 2012 summer months. These boys were 16 and 17 and had never had an adult drive with them. The 17 year-old was looking at going into the military and needed a driver's license to be considered. I tried to help him by purchasing the drivers training manual and interactive quizzes online along with taking him driving. With the advice from my son's Drivers' Education teacher, I took him and the other young man out in the empty school parking lot. It was alarming to find that just knowing how hard to press on the gas was an experience he had not had so he began by backing out of a parking spot and making a complete circle before letting up on the gas. Although we advanced to driving around the block that day, he never did get more training that one day. He has since turned 18 and may have to take the test a few times but passing the test without training for this young man should still make a strong point for the need for all teens to be given the opportunity for Drivers Education.

Those of us who take it for granted that our kids will be trained at any cost should be just as alarmed about those who do not participate in the program. Parents and guardians who cannot afford to provide this training are not only putting their own children at risk but everyone else on the road. Please support this bill for the good of all citizens and consider in the near future to require all teenagers the opportunity to receive Drivers Education - as funded mandate.

Sincerely,

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