

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5051

As of February 4, 2013

Title: An act relating to the classroom portion of traffic safety education courses.

Brief Description: Authorizing online driver's education for the classroom portion of traffic safety education courses.

Sponsors: Senators Hatfield and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/30/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Amanda Cecil (786-7429)

Background: A person under the age of 18 must meet several conditions to receive a driver's license, including completion of a traffic safety education course. A person who is at least 15 years old but less than 15 and one half years old must be enrolled in a traffic safety education course to receive an instruction permit. A person at least 15 and one half years old but less than 18 years old does not need to be enrolled in a traffic safety education course to receive an instruction permit, but the person must complete a traffic safety education course to receive a driver's license. In addition, the Department of Licensing (DOL) may waive the written examination to receive an instruction permit if the applicant is enrolled in a traffic safety education course.

The traffic safety education course requirement can be met by either completing a course through an approved driver training school or completing a course offered by a high school. Traffic safety education courses offered by high schools are managed locally through the school districts, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) oversees and certifies the instructors and curriculum for the programs. Driver training school courses are offered privately, but the schools are overseen by the DOL. A course that is offered by an approved driver training school or a high school must include both classroom instruction and driving experience.

Summary of Bill: The classroom portion of a traffic safety education course provided by an approved driver training school or a course offered by a high school can include content delivered using the internet or other computer-based methods.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Online driving training could provide cheaper and more accessible options for people in rural areas. It also allows people to learn at their own pace in a quiet environment.

CON: Data about online versus instructor-led training is needed before changing the existing model. Evidence regarding young people and education shows that an emotional connection is crucial to effective learning and changing of behavior, which requires a live human instructor. While online education probably needs to be explored, this is not the time. Recently passed legislation allowed commercial driving schools to conduct driver license exams, which is requiring a great deal of time and energy on the part of driving schools and DOL. This will be a step backwards for the safety of young drivers. Providing training online will also not reduce the cost and could drive business to out-of-state providers that can provide lower quality trainings at a lower cost.

OTHER: Online learning can be done well but we need to ensure that best practices are implemented.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Arber Demiri, citizen.

CON: Lucinda Young, WA Education Assn.; Debra Grenier, WA Traffic Safety and Education Assn.; Clay Monson, Jeff Caldwell, 911 Driving School; J.C. Fawcett, Professional Driving School Assn. of WA, Defensive Driving School; David Gile, Confident Driving Instruction.

OTHER: Allan Jones; OSPI.