

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5816

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As of February 23, 2015

**Title:** An act relating to reducing traffic fatalities and serious injuries through improved traffic safety education.

**Brief Description:** Expanding traffic safety education requirements for certain driver's license applicants and drivers.

**Sponsors:** Senators Liias, Benton, Rivers, Jayapal and McAuliffe.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/16/15.

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### 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.

The traffic safety education course requirement can be met by either completing a course through a licensed 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 oversees and certifies the instructors and curriculum for the programs. Driver training school courses offered privately are licensed and overseen by the Department of Licensing (DOL). A course that is offered by an approved driver training school or a high school must include both classroom instruction and driving experience.

A driver that has been convicted of any of the following offences must have their license suspended for a period of two to four years: vehicular homicide; vehicular assault; driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol; any felony that included the use of a motor vehicle; failure to stop and give information or render aid in an accident that resulted in death, injury, or damage of another motor vehicle; perjury or false affidavit to DOL related to the ownership or operation of a motor vehicle; or a third conviction of reckless driving within a two-year period.

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*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.*

**Summary of Bill:** A person that is 18 to 24 years of age who is applying for their first Washington State driver's license and that has not completed a course in traffic safety education must complete a Young Driver Risk Prevention Traffic Safety Course. This requirement would not apply to a person that holds an out-of-state license, if they have held that license for at least one year or if they are a member of the armed forces; and those that receive a waiver from DOL because they have demonstrated that they are unable to take the course, they are safe drivers, and that a need exists for the them to operate a vehicle. Additionally, a driver whose license was suspended as described above must take a High-Risk Driver Safety course prior to reinstatement of their license.

Licensed driver training schools must offer Young Driver Risk Prevention Traffic Safety and High-Risk Driver Traffic Safety Education courses, unless they can demonstrate that doing so is a hardship. Each course must be no more than ten hours, three of which must be behind-the-wheel training and the remainder may be conducted online. The course must be able to be completed in a reasonable time so as not to unduly delay an applicant from obtaining a license. The minimum course curriculum must be developed by DOL in consultation with the Traffic Safety Commission and other stakeholders, and must provide information about distracted driving; safe driving techniques concerning hazards, such as severe weather, sharing the road with other vehicles and pedestrians, and driving in construction and school zones; the duties incumbent upon drivers, such as insurance and registration and steps drivers must take after an accident; and the effects of alcohol and drug use, including information on drug and alcohol-related traffic injury and mortality rates, and current penalties for driving under the influence. The behind-the-wheel portion of the course must include basic skills and maneuvers as determined by DOL. DOL must ensure timely access to high-quality affordable courses throughout the state.

There is a \$5 fee assessed upon applicants that take either course. Proceeds from fees are deposited into the newly created High-Risk and Young Driver Safety Education Account and used to provide financial assistance to indigent applicants. For the purposes of this act indigent includes anyone that is receiving public assistance, is involuntarily committed to a public mental health facility, or has an annual income of 125 percent of the federally established poverty level.

DOL may establish rules necessary to carry out this act.

An intent is declared.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on January 1, 2017.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Drivers between ages 18 and 24 are twice as likely to be involved in a fatality or serious injury accident, and commit three times the rate of infractions. Many people are skipping driver education because of the high cost and other

reasons and as a result they are not safe drivers. Driver education is key in attaining the goals and objectives of Target Zero. Many adults take driver training voluntarily to be better and safer drivers. Larger schools would be able to offer more classes. Many other states have passed or are considering this type of legislation. Washington should be a leader in this area of safety. Washington State has made many positive advances towards Target Zero and the 18 to 24-year-old group is an area that needs improvement. This bill provides a basic framework that could advance safety with classroom and behind-the-wheel training. The bill could use a few minor changes to words. Eliminating high-risk drivers from the program would simplify administration of the program and high-risk drivers have less of an issue with education and their issues are related more to substance abuse.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Liias, prime sponsor; Janet Ray, AAA WA; Tony Sermonti, DOL; JC Fawcett, Prof. Drivers School Assn.; Joe Giammona, The Driver Training Group; Lynn Rogers, Parkside Driving School; Dawn Vyvyan, Prof Driving School Assn.; Shelly Baldwin, WA Traffic Safety Commission.