

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5816

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 25, 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, 2/25/15 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5816 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators King, Chair; Fain, Vice Chair; Hobbs, Ranking Minority Member; Liias, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cleveland, Habib, Jayapal, Litzow, Miloscia, Pedersen and Rivers.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Ericksen.

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.

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 (Recommended Substitute): 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. Additionally DOL may provide a waiver to applicants that have demonstrated that they are unable to take the course and that a need exists for the them to operate a vehicle.

Licensed driver training schools must offer Young Driver Risk Prevention Traffic Safety Education courses, unless they can demonstrate that doing so is a hardship. The 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 fee of up to \$5 assessed upon applicants that take the course. Proceeds from fees are deposited into the newly created Young Driver Safety Education Account and used to provide financial assistance to indigent applicants, as determined by DOL in consultation with a statewide organization that represents disadvantaged communities.

DOL must consult with the Traffic Safety Commission and other stakeholders on strategies for addressing high-risk drivers and report back to the Legislature and the Governor's Office by December 2017 with recommendations.

The Treasurer must transfers \$100,000 from the Highway Safety Fund to the Young Driver Safety Education Account on January 1, 2017.

DOL may establish rules necessary to carry out this act.

An intent is declared.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Removes all requirements and references to High-Risk Driver Safety.

Removes the requirement that an applicant demonstrate that they can safely operate a motor vehicle before DOL may waive the Young Driver Risk prevention course requirement.

Provides that financial assistance for indigent drivers may be a full or partial subsidy voucher.

Changes the definition of indigent to be determined by DOL in consultation with a statewide organization that represents disadvantaged communities.

Requires that DOL consult with the Traffic Safety Commission and other stakeholders on strategies for addressing high-risk drivers and report back to the Legislature and the Governor's Office by December 2017 with recommendations.

Transfers \$100,000 from the Highway Safety Fund to the Young Driver Safety Education Account on January 1, 2017.

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 on Original Bill: 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 Sermoniti, 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.