



Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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October 25, 2016

National Teen Driver Safety Week

Last week, October 16-22, was National Teen Driver Safety Week. Thanks to the implementation of new laws lengthening the time young drivers spend gaining experience driving in a variety of situations, rates of teen driver crashes are down. A study published in the *Journal of Safety Research* in July 2015 found that the crash rates of teenagers dropped when Graduated Driver's License (GDL) laws were implemented around the country. Specifically, the study found that the per person rate of fatal and other crash rates declined sharply between 1996 and 2012 for 16 and 17 year-olds than for middle-aged adult drivers. During that same time period, young teenagers' crashes at night or with multiple passengers in the car also declined.

In 1999, I introduced legislation creating Wisconsin's Graduated Driver's License system after hearing from a Ripon family whose son had been killed in a car accident. At that time, the idea of giving teenage drivers more time to gain experience before they are allowed to drive with a carful of friends was just taking hold across the country. Today, every state in the nation has a Graduate Driver's License system.

Wisconsin's GDL law applies to drivers between 15 ½ years old and 18 years old. There are three main provisions of Wisconsin's GDL law. First, teenagers must hold their learner's permit for 6 months without receiving a ticket for a motor vehicle law violation. During that time, they practice driving with an adult for at least 30 hours, 10 of which must be at night. Second, once a teenager completes a driver's education class and passes the driving test, they are issued a nine month probationary license which restricts when they may drive and how many passengers they

can have. These new drivers can have one non-family passenger with them and cannot drive between the hours of midnight and 5 AM unless they are going between home and school or home and work. The third major provision on the GDL law is that these restrictions can be extended past the initial nine month period if the driver violates these provisions, if they are convicted of a motor vehicle violation, or has their license suspended or revoked.

In 2012, I co-authored legislation to prohibit drivers with a learner's permit or a probationary license from using a cell phone while driving except to report an emergency. This law went into effect on November 1, 2012. We learned with the Graduated Driver's License law that teenagers need extra time to practice and develop their skills before they introduce additional distractions, be they friends, late night driving or cell phones.

Data collected by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety indicates a 73.7 percent drop in the rate of fatal car crashes by 16 year-olds between 1996 and 2014. Older teenagers also saw a downward trend in deaths behind the wheel. The rate for 17 year-old drivers dropped 63.7 percent, 18 year old drivers dropped 56.4 percent and 19 year old drivers dropped 45.3 percent. Researchers determined that implementation of Graduated Driver's License laws cut the per capita fatal crash risk by one-third for 16 year-olds and by 17 percent for 17 year-olds.

The next time you visit my state office, look for my special GDL license plate on the wall. Working with constituents, national research organizations, my fellow legislators and the state's Department of Transportation to craft this law is one of my proudest accomplishments.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at:

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