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Rep. Crafts and Sen Nangle, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on LD 1480, "An Act Regarding Exceptions for Persons Learning to Drive Who Have Not Yet Completed a Driver Education Course."

For the safety of our young drivers, it is essential they have every opportunity to build the skills necessary to navigate the roads safely. This includes full participation in driver education programs, where they are under the watchful eye of an instructor trained in the specifics of teaching driving. A trained educator has the expertise to not only teach the necessary technical skills but also to instill the judgment and caution that often elude young drivers. As a parent who is currently training my 16-year-old and has already seen the benefits of a structured driver's education program with my 19-year-old, I can personally attest to the importance of this education.

It is not safe for children who have never driven but have passed the driver's examination to be given a learner's permit. Drivers aged 15-20 are overrepresented in car accidents, despite making up a smaller percentage of licensed drivers. Specifically, drivers in this age group represent 8.1% of those involved in fatal crashes, even though they account for just 5% of all licensed drivers. Furthermore, the fatal crash rate for drivers aged 16-19 is nearly three times higher than for drivers aged 20 and older, per mile driven. These statistics reveal a glaring truth: young drivers are at a significantly higher risk, and this risk is even greater for those who have not received adequate preparation.

The driver's education program was invaluable for providing my children with a solid foundation before they began their 70 hours of supervised driving with me. While supervised driving is essential, it is not the same as learning under the guidance of a professional instructor. A trained educator brings an objective perspective and expertise that even the most diligent parent cannot replicate. Without this professional guidance, young drivers are more likely to make risky decisions and be less prepared to handle unexpected situations on the road.

If the goal is to ensure young drivers' safety, the focus should be on mandating comprehensive driver education programs rather than just passing an exam.

