



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## **Amy Roeder**

46 Blackstone Street  
Bangor, ME 04401

Residence: 207-370-5517

[Amy.Roeder@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Amy.Roeder@legislature.maine.gov)

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*Testimony of Representative Amy Roeder Presenting*

### **LD 1712, An Act Regarding Driver's Licenses for Individuals in Foster Care**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Amy Roeder, and I represent House District 23 which includes a portion of Bangor. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce **LD 1712, An Act Regarding Driver's Licenses for Individuals in Foster Care**.

This bill would help our foster youth obtain a driver's license. Specifically, it would make obtaining a license easier for those living without the care of a guardian.

You may remember learning to drive with your parents or family members. My own parents were great teachers, though I was a far from perfect student. I had the benefit of having drivers education through my public school, as well, which was an economical way for most parents to make sure their children got the theoretical and practical drivers instruction that they needed. Though my driving skills left much to be desired and resulted in my parents and driver's ed instructor having significantly more gray hair by the time I got my license, there were few barriers for me to become a licensed driver. I was lucky.

My eldest son was also lucky. He came to me from the foster care system, just four days from turning 15. When he decided to take driver's ed, we had the means and the time to provide for that education and to help him log his hours. Not every foster child will have the same experience, and my bill attempts to address the inequities surrounding youth in care getting driver's education and their licenses.

As you can imagine, obtaining a driver's license is one way in which foster youth can gain greater independence, both socially and economically.

Transportation presents one of the biggest barriers for foster youth to access education, housing and employment, especially in our more rural parts of the state where public transportation may be

nonexistent. Further, according to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, foster youth with driver's licenses were 1.6 times as likely as their peers to attend school and nearly twice as likely to work.

In more detail, this bill calls for the following:

1. It requires the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) to conduct an annual survey on how many people between 15 and 16 years of age who are or were in foster care are eligible to obtain a driver's license, have obtained a driver's license, have completed a driver education course, have obtained a learner's permit or have obtained a state identification card. The office is required to submit a report annually by January 15 to this committee with its findings, along with an evaluation of the budgetary requirements of funding associated with these findings and an evaluation of the performance and outcomes of the programs;
2. It requires OCFS to establish a program to pay for the fees and costs incurred by a minor placed in the care of someone other than the minor's biological parents or a minor who is living independently related to obtaining a license and motor vehicle insurance and additional costs related to obtaining a driver's license;
3. It directs the establishments of a program to ensure that any minor placed in the care of someone other than the minor's biological parents or a minor who is 15 years of age or older who is living independently is provided the opportunity to obtain assistance in obtaining a driver's license or learner's permit or enrolling in a driver education course;
4. It provides that a licensed dealer is required to allow a minor who is at least 15 years and 6 months of age who had been placed in the care of someone other than the minor's biological parents or a minor who is living independently who has a valid driver's license to contract for the purchase of a motor vehicle;
5. It directs the Secretary of State to waive all fees assessed by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles related to obtaining a license for a person who has not attained 27 years of age and who is or has been placed in the care of someone other than the person's parents;
6. It allows a minor who has no parent, guardian or spouse to have the minor's driver's license application signed by a lay caregiver of the minor who is 22 years of age or older, an employee designated by OCFS or the minor applicant if approved by OCFS;
7. It limits the liability of a person who lawfully signs an application for a minor who has no parent or guardian or spouse who has attained 18 years of age; and
8. It requires rating bureaus or independent insurers as recognized by the Superintendent of Insurance to allow certain minors who are driver education school graduates to obtain vehicle liability insurance with rights, privileges and benefits equal to those of an individual policyholder who is 19 years of age or older.

The Secretary of State's office has some friendly amendments that they will share with you in their testimony of which I am very much in favor of as they clarify many of the finer points of this legislation.

I put in this bill for my son Kurtis and all of the young people like him in our foster care system. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer your questions.