



Department of the Secretary of State Bureau of Motor Vehicles

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

L.D. 1480 “An Act Regarding Exceptions for Persons Learning to Drive Who Have Not Yet Completed a Driver Education Course”

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State and
Cathie Curtis, Deputy Secretary for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles,
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Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, Members of the Transportation Committee, I am here to provide testimony in opposition to L.D. 1480 “An Act Regarding Exceptions for Persons Learning to Drive Who Have Not Yet Completed a Driver Education Course.”

Maine’s legal requirement for new drivers under 18 years of age to complete driver education is a cornerstone of our roadway safety program. As recently as 2022, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration praised Maine’s mandated driver education program during a program review.

One of the most critical elements of our driver education program is the requirement for students to complete 6 hours of academic instruction with a licensed driver education instructor before beginning behind-the-wheel instruction. This provision, established in Department Rule, ensures the new driver has been introduced to some of the most fundamental knowledge elements of driving—including signage, right-of-way, and basic handling--before attempting to do so on Maine’s roadways.

L.D. 1480 would remove the requirement for academic instruction in advance of behind-the-wheel instruction for under-18 students, allowing non-instructors to provide the first experience on the roads.

Today, we have 2 tools that help us offset the inherent dangers of a novice student driver during their first ten hours behind the wheel. One, the student begins their behind-the-wheel with a license professional instructor, who is fully prepared to anticipate likely errors, and explain proper procedure and technique. Two, all driver education vehicles must be equipped with a safety brake pedal at the passenger seat to ensure the instructor can intervene if needed while the student is most vulnerable and least experienced.

In contrast, a parent, guardian or other adult who meets the requirements to help a novice driver obtain their 70 hours of experience has neither of these safety nets available to them. As a result, this proposal puts young student drivers and others on the road at unnecessary risk. Numerous studies show fewer crashes and other violation in teens who receive driving instruction from driver education schools rather than with parents or other avenues.

Finally, from an implementation perspective, this L.D. would require BMV to prepare to support a significant spike in the volume of written exam applications. Students who currently take their pre-permit written exam with a driver ed school would turn to BMV for an exam at a BMV branch. To avoid increased exam backlog in Maine's densest population areas, BMV would require 2 additional Examiners to facilitate the increased load. We would also need to modify our licensing software. Given our ongoing modernization efforts, we would ask to defer the implementation date for L.D. 1480 to October 1st, 2026.

I look forward to your questions and discussion, and we will be happy to provide any additional information at the work session upon your request.