



Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

LD 1480: An Act Regarding Exceptions for Persons Learning to Drive Who Have Not Yet Completed a Driver Education Course

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Tom Baran, and I am a Traffic Safety Education Specialist with AAA Northern New England. AAA Northern New England is an auto club and membership organization of over 1 million members in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. AAA actively advocates for public policy that make Maine a safer place to live, work, and raise our families. Today, I come before you in opposition to LD1480.

I would like to thank Representative Mastraccio for introducing this bill. Teen driving is one of AAA's top priorities and this hearing gives an opportunity to discuss this very important topic.

Across Maine and the nation, we are seeing a deeply concerning trend: motor vehicle crashes continue to be the **leading cause of death for teens**. The reason is straightforward — teen drivers are inexperienced, still developing the cognitive and emotional skills necessary for safe driving, and often face pressures that can increase risk, including peer influence, distraction, and a tendency to take risks behind the wheel.

Teen drivers are particularly vulnerable in the following high-risk situations:

- Driving with multiple passengers
- Nighttime driving
- Not using seat belts
- Driving while distracted
- Operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs

We must find ways to expand access to quality driver education without compromising the safety of all road users.

AAA has conducted extensive research on this issue, and study after study confirms that teen drivers are among our most vulnerable motorists. According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, teen drivers are **three times more likely** than adults to be involved in a fatal crash. Alarming, **two-thirds of those injured or killed in crashes involving teen drivers are people other than the teen driver themselves**.

Research consistently shows that driver education works. Teens who complete structured, professional driver education programs — either through a commercial driving school or a public-school program — are significantly less likely to be involved in crashes or convicted of traffic violations compared to those who do not.

A particularly compelling study by the **Texas Transportation Institute** examined outcomes for teens who received parent-taught driver education versus those who received instruction from professional educators. The results were striking:

- Parent-taught teens were significantly more likely to be convicted of moving violations, including speeding.
- They were involved in more serious crashes — nearly **three times more likely** to be involved in a fatal crash after graduating from GDL restrictions.
- These drivers were involved in **50% more crashes** resulting in severe injury compared to their peers who received professional instruction.

These findings reinforce a simple truth: **Driver education saves lives**. Allowing teens to drive without first completing or enrolling in driver education exposes them — and everyone on the road — to unnecessary danger.

AAA has long supported Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) systems, which are designed to gradually introduce teens to driving under conditions that minimize risk. Weakening the educational foundation of the GDL process would undercut decades of progress in teen driver safety.

Learning to drive safely is not a single event — it's a structured process. That process requires **education, enforcement, and proven policies** such as those found in strong GDL systems. As road conditions become more complex — with more congestion, faster traffic, and more distractions — it is more important than ever that teens receive the highest quality training available.

We share the goal of ensuring that every teen in Maine has access to the knowledge and skills they need to drive safely. But access should not come at the expense of safety. Now is the time to strengthen our approach — not weaken it.

AAA urges this committee to oppose legislation that would allow teen drivers to begin operating a vehicle before receiving structured driver education. Let's uphold a standard of safety that Maine families can count on — and that other states can look to as a model. We do though highly support the recommendations of the February 2025 Driver Education Working Group Report which would create better access to comprehensive, up to date, and professional delivered driver education. This report outlines meaningful, practical solutions to improve teen access to professional driver education and strengthens Maine's driver safety infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to protecting our youngest drivers. I would be happy to answer any questions

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