

Speaking in favor of LD #1480, HP0972

Distinguished members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Maura Herlihy and I am a resident of Sanford Maine, a business owner, and a current member of the Sanford City Council.

Years ago, I spoke to Representative Mastraccio about the challenges faced by adults and children trying to obtain their driver's license. Let's face it, Driver's Education classes fill quickly and are very expensive and out of reach for many. Rep. Mastracchio and I continued our dialogue on this subject off and on and this draft legislation reflects most of those discussions.

I am here today to speak in favor of changes to the way Maine manages Driver Education and the process by which residents may obtain a license here in our State. My experience has not been the result of teaching my children to drive but rather the result of watching my sister and her husband, residents of New Hampshire, raise 5 children into excellent drivers today. At the age of 15 ½, my sister's children were ready at the door with birth certificate in hand ready to start their life behind the wheel. My sister would let them drive everywhere, training them in the ways of the road, no written test or learner's permit required. After, or around, their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday all of my nieces and nephews took Driver's Education Courses, spent 10 hours on the road getting "fine-tuned" by the Driving Instructor and taking classroom instruction for the New Hampshire State written exam. Once they passed the written exam, proctored by the Driving School, they would quickly beg my sister to take them to the DMV in New Hampshire for their Road Test. They all passed with flying colors, because of the hours spent on the road with their parents and the "fine-tuning" given by the Driving School.

Above is an example of what could be for the State of Maine and the under 18 driving candidate:

- Driving at 15 ½ with parents or licensed driver as long as the Birth Certificate is in the car.
- Mandatory Driver's Education around or after your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Mandatory 70 hours of driving, but that can occur before or after the actual Drivers' Education Class.
- No Learners Permit required.
- Written test proctored by the Driving School

What about 18 and above? Well, I have a story for that too.

My employee, Ashley, is 36 years of age and does not drive. She is raising 5 children and must rely on others for Grocery Shopping and to get to and from work. When she was young, she could not afford Driver's Education and today it would be a luxury to take that money and spend it on herself. Ashley is also petrified of studying and taking a written exam all on her own. Imagine a world in which she could start training behind the wheel with a licensed driver. She could shake off some of the fear and then take a reasonably priced, classroom instruction ONLY course from her local Adult Education program and take the written test immediately following the classroom hours with the instructor proctoring the exam in a room she has become familiar with. For many, walking into the DMV to take an exam is like climbing Mt.

Kathadin. Even if the material has been well studied, the unfamiliar environment is frightening. In Ashley's case, it has frozen her into inaction even after many years of encouragement.

In conclusion, I would ask you to consider the following:

- Does a written test really need to be taken before you hit the road for practical driving experience with a licensed driver? I could argue that the practical experience will make people more successful when taking the exam. Not all people learn through books.
- Do we really need Learner's Permits? Allowing people to drive with licensed drivers and their birth certificate should be sufficient.
- Should Adult Education or other venues be allowed to offer instructional classes, no driving, with proctored State written exams at the end of the coursework?
- I still believe the following to be good:
  - Under 18 must have a full Driver's Education Experience with Classwork and Driving time built into the Instruction.
  - 70 hours of driving before taking the Road Test should stay mandatory but may include driving before the Driver's Education Course and/or the written test have been taken.

When in poverty the obstacles faced are overwhelming, the State must be open to reasonable options that allow a Drivers' license not to be one of those unobtainable obstacles. As an elderly tenant once told me, after giving up her license, "Giving up Driving is not only giving up my freedom, but also like losing a best friend."

Thank you.

Maura A. Herlihy

Sanford Resident