

STATE SENATOR KATHY BERNIER
TWENTY-THIRD SENATE DISTRICT



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From: Senator Kathy Bernier
To: The Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 15
Relating to: motor vehicle instruction permit and probationary license eligibility and duration.
Date: March 10, 2021

Thank you Chairman Petrowski and committee members for allowing me to provide testimony on Senate Bill 15 today. When Representative Pronschinske called me with this idea for a bill, brought to him by a constituent of his, I thought it would be a great piece of legislation and I was looking forward to bringing it to this committee.

Anyone who has lived in Wisconsin for twelve months knows: we get the full range of every season. Heck, sometimes we get three seasons in a single day! Driving in snow and ice is a lot different than driving on a sunny summer day, and teenagers learning to drive should be given the opportunity to learn to handle any conditions.

Wisconsin law sets a number of requirements for minors to obtain an instruction permit, one of them being that the individual must be at least 15 and a half years old. Once they get this instruction permit and in order to obtain a probationary license, there are more requirements that must be met such as: they must have 30 hours of driving experience (10 at night), they must complete a driver education course; they must have held the instruction permit for at least six months, and they must be 16 years old.

This bill would lower the age of requirement to obtain an instruction permit from 15 ½ to simply 15 years. As the bill stands, nothing else would change. A teenager would still need to practice with at least 30 hours of driving experience (10 at night), complete a driver education course, hold the permit for at least six months, and be 16 to obtain a probationary license. This gives parents the *option* to begin that process earlier, working with their children on navigating roads in all conditions.

The majority of states have an instruction permit age of 15 or younger, and the majority of states have a holding period of six months or less.

For this committee's future consideration, I am working on an amendment with Representative Pronschinske that would raise the hour requirement from 30 to 50.

Thank you again for the time today, and I am happy to answer any questions.



TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Senate Bill 15 & Assembly Bill 20: Motor vehicle instruction permit and probationary license eligibility and duration

Thank you Chairman Petrowski and members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government for allowing me to speak on this important bill today and how it will benefit the kids and parents of Wisconsin.

As a milestone in our American culture, many teenagers in our state look forward to the day that they can finally get their driver's license. It provides them with independence, responsibility, maturity and a place in adult society. With that being said, our laws currently do not reflect the need for more opportunities to practice driving in our unique Wisconsin weather and landscape.

I'm here today because Senator Bernier and I have introduced legislation that would allow teenagers who are 15 years old to receive their driver's permit, instead of the current age at 15 and a half.

Wisconsin is a vast and often temperamental state when it comes to different landscapes and weather patterns. As someone with a teenage daughter, I realize the value of giving kids extra time to experience the differences in driving in urban versus rural areas. Many things like how to drive in Amish communities and during a harvest season are not taught in urban areas. Additionally, how to drive on heavy traffic highways, one way roads, and roundabouts are not always taught in rural areas.

This extra time would allow kids and parents the opportunity to explore those areas if they chose to. This would also provide extra time to practice in all different weather. If a 16 year old has prior experience driving in a snowstorm with a parent or guardian they will be more likely to drive safer when they are on their own.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 32 states allow for young drivers to apply for their permit at 15 years old or younger. There are no states in the union that require winter driving. However some states do require driving in "inclement weather."

Once again, this bill provides an opportunity for safety and peace of mind by allowing young people more time to refine their driving skills.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this legislation.



Written Testimony of Nick Jarmusz
Midwest Director of Public Affairs
AAA – The Auto Club Group

Wisconsin Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government - Hearing on Senate Bill 15
March 10, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Petrowski and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Nick Jarmusz, and I am the Midwest director of public affairs for AAA – The Auto Club Group.

The Auto Club Group currently provides services including insurance, driver training, emergency roadside assistance and advocacy to over seven hundred thousand (700,000) AAA members in Wisconsin.

Adequately preparing teens for the responsibility of driving is a collaborative effort between parents, driving instructors and policymakers, and has substantial implications for all roadway users. Approximately one third of all fatalities resulting from crashes involving a teen driver are other roadway users, including occupants of other vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, drivers under the age of 18 are involved in nearly ten thousand (10,000) traffic crashes each year in this state.

While crash risk for all teens is considerably higher than drivers in other age groups, the risk is highest during a teen's first year after obtaining their license - regardless of what age they were at the time. Simply put: the more experience a teen gets behind the wheel, the safer they – and everyone else sharing the road with them – will be.

This legislation would increase the amount of supervised experience a teen can get without pushing back the age at which they can apply for their probationary license. We believe this would be a net gain for teens, parents and the motoring public at large if it included provisions to ensure that teens took advantage of this additional opportunity for supervised experience behind the wheel. This can be achieved by increasing the minimum required holding period for learner's permits from the current 6 month to 9, and increasing the number of practice hours that must be documented in order to apply for a probationary license.

Expanding the minimum permit holding period from 6 to 9 months will ensure that every new teen driver has the opportunity to practice driving, while supervised, in snowy and icy conditions at some point during the 4 to 5 month period between Wisconsin's average first snowfall in November and the last in February or March. A national study of Graduated Drivers Licensing systems found that states with a minimum holding period of 9 months saw a decrease in fatal crashes among 16 year old drivers more than twice as large as states with only a 6 month holding period - 26 percent, compared to 11

percent, respectively. Currently, 13 states – including neighboring Iowa and Illinois – require at least a 9 month holding period, with several – including Iowa - requiring a full year.

We would further recommend that the number of practice hours that permit holders must document when applying for a probationary license be increased from the current 30 to 50. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, collision claims among 16 and 17 year old drivers could be reduced an additional 5% if this provision were to be enacted. Currently, 29 states – including Michigan and Illinois – require at least 50 practice hours.

Neither of these additional provisions would detract from the original substance of the legislation. Teens would still be able to receive their permit at 15 and their probationary license at 16. These provisions would simply ensure that the additional time afforded for supervised practice driving before age 16 is utilized. AAA supports the adoption of this legislation so long as these provisions are included. Doing so would substantially reduce the crash risk and fatality rate of teen drivers and increase the safety of all roadway users in Wisconsin.

March 9, 2021

Dear Chairman Petrowski, Committee on Transportation and Local Government:

As it is now, when a person turns 15 years and 6 months old they can obtain an instructional driving permit and when they turn 16 years old they can obtain a probationary driver's license. Current law only requires that teenagers drive six months with an instructional driver's permit before they are eligible to get a probationary driver's license. As a parent of three teenage daughters and a law enforcement officer of 20 years, I believe this is not enough time to truly understand the responsibility of having a driver's license and to gain enough driving experience.

My oldest daughter recently got her driver's license and my second daughter has her instructional permit. My oldest daughter has a birthday in the fall and my other daughter has a birthday in the spring. As a result my oldest daughter had her instructional permit with her only drive time during good road conditions and some road construction. My second daughter's only driving time has been during winter driving conditions and no road construction. Six months is not enough time for a teen driver to be able to experience all types of weather and road conditions.

In addition, today there are more cars on the road, there are more distractions built into the cars, and of course, cell phones. Just in the last 10 years speed limits have increased, number of lanes on highways have increased, and number of vehicles on the road have increased. There is a lot to learn about driving and being a defensive driver in just six months for these teenage drivers.

What I would like to see is that teenagers can go to driver's education at the age of 14 years and six months old and then at 15 years old they are able to get an instructional permit. This would give teenage drivers a full year of instructional driving before they turn 16 and are able to get a probationary driver's license. This full year would give them an opportunity to drive in all weather and road conditions, daytime and nighttime, resulting in more experience driving when they turn 16 and are able to get a probationary driver's license. In addition to providing a full year of instructional permit experience, I recommend increasing the number supervised driving hours to 40 hours with 15 hours of nighttime driving.

As a law enforcement officer, I've been to many crashes with teenage drivers who didn't know what to do when the roads were ice or snow covered or what to do when a deer jumps out in front of them. Again, I believe with a full year of instructional driving they will be better prepared to drive in these conditions.

An example of another state that allows a longer instructional permit period is Iowa. In Iowa, teenagers who are 14 years old can take a vision and a written test to get an instructional permit; this gives them two years of instructional driving before they get a driver's license. And in Iowa you must have an instructional permit for a minimum of a year before you can get your probationary driver's license.

Due to the amount of responsibility and liability there is in operating a motor vehicle I think teenagers need more than six months with an instructional permit. When teens become Freshman in high school we don't expect them to take ACT or SAT six months into their high school career. They get until their Junior year to learn and study before they take the tests.

To recap I believe there is benefit in allowing teenagers to get their instructional permits at 15 years old and in driving a full year during all types of road and weather conditions before they are 16 years old and able to get a probationary driver's license. Just like with everything else in life, the more we have time to learn and practice, the more we know and the better we get.

Thank you,

William Straschinske
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