

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6503

As of February 7, 2014

Title: An act relating to expanding the delivery of traffic safety education.

Brief Description: Expanding the delivery of traffic safety education.

Sponsors: Senators Liias and Angel.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/05/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Amanda Cecil (786-7429)

Background: A person under the age of 18 must meet several conditions to receive a driver's license, including completion of a traffic safety education course. A person who is at least 15 years of age but less than 15 and one-half years of age must be enrolled in a traffic safety education course to receive an instruction permit. A person at least 15 and one-half years of age but less than 18 years of age does not need to be enrolled in a traffic safety education course to receive an instruction permit, but the person must complete a traffic safety education course to receive a driver's license. In addition, the Department of Licensing (DOL) may waive the written examination to receive an instruction permit if the applicant is enrolled in a traffic safety education course.

The traffic safety education course requirement can be met by either completing a course through an approved driver training school or completing a course offered by a high school. Traffic safety education courses offered by high schools are managed locally through the school districts, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction oversees and certifies the instructors and curriculum for the programs. Driver training school courses are offered privately and overseen by DOL. A course that is offered by an approved driver training school or a high school must include both classroom instruction and driving experience.

Summary of Bill: Online Traffic Safety Education Pilot. DOL may establish a pilot project that would allow up to 1000 students to meet the traffic safety education requirements online. At least 40 percent of the students must live east of the Cascade mountains. DOL must establish rules related to an online traffic safety pilot and may specify that it be offered by DOL or a private driver training school, or as a partnership between the two. Within six

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months after the last student completes the course or by June 30, 2016, whichever is earlier, DOL must report to the Legislature on the success of the program, including a summary of the student performance compared to traditional education, a cost comparison, and a recommendation on whether to expand the pilot.

A person that is 18 to 24 years of age who is applying for their first driver's license that has not completed a course in traffic safety education must complete a young driver risk prevention traffic safety course. The curriculum of a young driver risk prevention traffic safety course must be developed by DOL and include behind-the-wheel training. Driver training schools may offer young driver risk prevention traffic safety courses.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 2014.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Drivers between the ages of 18 and 24 have been identified as a group that cause a disproportionate number of serious and fatal accidents. The cost and availability of driver training courses and the intermediate driver restrictions has led to many young people waiting until after they are 18 to get their license and they are missing out on the opportunity to get prepared for their first license. A short course for drivers between 18 and 24 would give people the opportunity to learn about some of the risks related to driving. Law enforcement, driver training schools, and others have found that being able to pass the written and driver portions of the test does not necessarily mean that the driver understands all the risks and rules of driving. The 18 to 24 year old age group does not have parental supervision and access to money and credit that allow them to get fast cars.

Offering some level of the training online will provide greater access to training to improve safety for those that do not have easy access to in-class education. However, there are unanswered questions about the details of an online program and curriculum.

Part of the benefit of classroom instruction is the interactive discussion that is instructor led but a portion of curriculum is well suited for online learning.

OTHER: Young drivers represent a level one priority in the State's Target Zero Highway Safety Plan as they account for the highest crash rates, speed, distracted driving, and impaired driving. There are few proven strategies that seem to make a difference in the behavior of young drivers, and the impacts of expanding education requirements, while it may help, is an unproven strategy. Progress has been made in the area of young drivers but there is still room for improvement.

Cost and quality of driver education programs are additional issues that need to be addressed. Driver safety programs need to allow for parent-taught driver education. More than 30 other states allows for homeschool driver education. Requiring anyone over 18 to take driver education is punishing them for having waited to get their license.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Liias, prime sponsor; Michael Jerrett, AAA WA, Public Affairs Manager; J.C. Fawcett, Administrator at Defensive Driving School; Dave Sedelmeier, owner of APAX Driving School; Michael Jackson, Cascade Driving School of Olympia and Yelm.

OTHER: Angie Ward, WA Traffic Safety Commission; DiAnna Brannan, Christian Homeschool Network; Tony Sermonti, DOL.