
Transportation Committee

HB 1878

Brief Description: Improving young driver safety.

Sponsors: Representatives Donaghy, Berry, Doglio, Tharinger, Santos, Fitzgibbon and Ramel.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands driver training education requirements to obtain a driver's license to individuals between the ages of 18 and 24, with staggered implementation between January 1, 2027, and January 1, 2033.
- Establishes a condensed traffic safety education course option for individuals aged 22 to 24 who are required to meet the new driver training education requirement.
- Authorizes the completion of an online, self-paced driver training education course approved by the Department of Licensing (DOL) as an option for fulfilling driver training education requirements for individuals under 18 years of age.
- Requires the DOL to establish a program to provide vouchers to cover the average cost of driver training education courses for qualifying novice drivers who reside in low-income households, subject to appropriations.
- Raises the fee to obtain a driver's instruction permit by \$10, the driver's license exam fee by \$15, and the license service fee by 25 cents, and restricts use of this revenue to expanding and improving driver's education programs and activities.

Hearing Date: 2/19/25

Staff: Jennifer Harris (786-7143).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

Driver Training Education.

To be eligible to obtain a driver's license, a person under the age of 18 must complete a driver training education course offered by a private driver training school licensed by the Department of Licensing (DOL) or by a school district.

Traffic safety education courses offered by a private driver training school for individuals under the age of 18 must include:

- at least 30 hours of classroom instruction;
- at least 6 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction (or 5 or more hours of behind-the-wheel instruction and 4 or more hours of driving simulation); and
- 1 or more hours of in-vehicle driver observation.

Traffic safety education courses offered by school districts must include a minimum of:

- 30 hours of classroom instruction;
- 6 hours of driving experience; and
- 4 hours of in-vehicle driver observation.

The DOL and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) maintain a required curriculum for approved private driver training schools and school districts that operate a driver training education program. The required curriculum includes content to develop knowledge, skills, and awareness. It is required to cover: (1) rules of the road; (2) vehicle components; (3) vehicle handling; (4) driver behavior; (5) sharing the road; (6) attention and perception; (7) hazard and risk management; (8) vehicle maintenance, malfunctions, and technology; (9) managing emergencies and adverse conditions; (10) respect and responsibility; and (11) vehicle technology systems.

The DOL may waive the driver training education course requirement if an applicant was licensed to drive a motor vehicle outside the state and provides proof that he or she completed a driver education equivalent to Washington's education requirement.

An applicant for a driver's license 18 years of age or older must successfully pass a driver licensing exam, but is not required to complete a driver training education course to be eligible for a license.

Driver Training Education Subsidy Programs.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families is required to contract with a private nonprofit organization to provide driver's license support for foster youth, subject to appropriation. Such support includes the reimbursement of fees required for a foster youth under the age of 18 to complete a driver training education course.

The Department of Labor and Industries is required to provide vouchers to cover the cost of driver training education courses for minors enrolled in a state-registered apprenticeship program, subject to appropriation.

Certain Department of Licensing Fees and Traffic Camera Revenue Use.

The fee to obtain a driver's instruction permit is \$25. The fee for the exam to obtain a new driver's license is \$35. A person who applies for a vehicle registration must pay a 75 cent license service fee.

Any revenue generated from the deployment of speed safety camera systems by the Washington State Department of Transportation must be deposited into the Highway Safety Fund and first be used for the operating and administrative costs of these camera systems. Any remaining revenue must be distributed for the purpose of traffic safety including, but not limited to, driver training education and local DUI emphasis patrols.

Summary of Bill:

Expansion of Driver Training Education Requirements.

Driver training education requirements that must be completed to obtain a driver's license are expanded to apply to individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 according to the following schedule:

- Beginning January 1, 2027, the requirements apply to individuals 18 years of age.
- Beginning January 1, 2028, the requirements apply to individuals 19 years of age.
- Beginning January 1, 2029, the requirements apply to individuals 20 years of age.
- Beginning January 1, 2030, the requirements apply to individuals 21 years of age.
- Beginning January 1, 2031, the requirements apply to individuals 22 years of age.
- Beginning January 1, 2032, the requirements apply to individuals 23 years of age.
- Beginning January 1, 2033, the requirements apply to individuals 24 years of age.

Individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 may fulfill the driver training education requirement by completing one of the following:

- a traffic safety education course offered by a private driver training school;
- a traffic safety education course offered by a school district; or
- an online, self-paced driver training education course approved by the DOL.

Individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 who complete an online, self-paced driver training education course must also complete at least six hours of behind-the-wheel instruction.

Individuals between the ages of 22 and 24 who complete an online, self-paced driver training education course must also complete at least four hours of behind-the-wheel instruction. Behind-the-wheel instruction may be offered for up to four hours on a single day. Schools are encouraged to offer this instruction in this manner in cases where students must travel long distances.

As an alternative to the above requirements, individuals between the ages of 22 and 24 years of age may complete a condensed traffic safety education course offered by a private driver training school or a school district. A "condensed traffic safety education course" is a course of instruction approved by the DOL or authorized by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and licensed by the DOL, which consists of at least eight hours of classroom instruction and three hours of behind-the-wheel instruction and follows an approved curriculum.

To meet the traffic safety education requirement for a motorcycle endorsement, an applicant between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age must complete a motorcycle safety education course that meets standards established by the DOL.

The DOL may waive the driver training education course requirement if the applicant demonstrates that:

1. the applicant was unable to take or complete a driver training education course;
2. a need exists for the applicant to operate a motor vehicle; and
3. the applicant has the ability to operate a motor vehicle in a manner that does not jeopardize safety.

The DOL may also waive the driver training education course requirement if an applicant was licensed to drive a motor vehicle in a reciprocal jurisdiction outside the state or provides proof that he or she obtained equivalent education in a reciprocal jurisdiction.

The DOL must annually report on the implementation of the new driver training education requirements, including on the readiness of the driver education school system to accommodate additional growth, to the Transportation Committees of the Legislature by January 1, 2026, through January 1, 2031. Beginning January 1, 2031, for the implementation phases for individuals between the ages of 22 and 24, the DOL may, by rule, pause or delay the driver training education requirements if, upon internal review, the DOL finds that there is an insufficient number of driver education and traffic safety education courses or instructors available for the pending age cohort.

The DOL may enact rules to require a person between the ages of 18 and 24 who has completed initial driver training education requirements to complete a driver education refresher course at the time of the person's first driver's license renewal.

Modification of Existing Driver Training Education Requirements.

Beginning January 1, 2027, to obtain a driver's license, individuals under the age of 18 may fulfill the traffic safety education course requirement by completing an online, self-paced driver training education course approved by the DOL, as well as at least six hours of behind-the-wheel instruction.

Driver Instructor Training Programs.

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated in the transportation budget for this purpose, the DOL must establish certification training programs to expand education opportunities for driver training school instructors. The program must:

1. implement a comprehensive traffic safety education program to train instructors;
2. establish mentorship programs and offer specialized grant programs or financial incentives to encourage diversity within the driver training school industry;
3. collaborate with the OSPI to align instructor requirements under DOL and OSPI rules to streamline the process of obtaining an instructor certification; and
4. facilitate partnerships between private driver training schools and high schools, vocational-technical schools, colleges, or universities, to enable private driver training school instructors to teach driver training education courses in school facilities.

Beginning, July 1, 2026, the DOL must submit an annual report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature every July 1 that details program activities and provides a programmatic and funding needs assessment, as well as any recommendations to support the program.

Driver Training Education Course Vouchers.

Beginning January 1, 2027, and subject to the availability of funds appropriated in the transportation budget for this purpose, the DOL must establish a program to provide vouchers to cover the average cost of driver training education courses for novice drivers who reside in low-income households, with the goal of assisting as many people as possible with the greatest need, measured both by income and mobility needs otherwise unserved, to access driver training education. In consultation with the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (Traffic Safety Commission), the DOL must adopt rules that establish eligibility criteria, as well as application and award procedures, for the voucher program.

The establishment of the voucher program does not create an entitlement to receive voucher program funds. A driver training school may not inflate driver training education course costs or fees to offset voucher amounts provided by school applicants. The DOL may evaluate course pricing to determine if costs or fees have been inflated for this purpose.

By December 1, 2025, the DOL, in consultation with the Traffic Safety Commission and the Department of Social and Health Services, is required to provide a policy framework and guidelines for the voucher program to the appropriate committees of the Legislature. Beginning January 1, 2028, the DOL must annually report specified voucher program information to the Transportation Committees of the Legislature.

Recipient income data collected by the DOL as part of the voucher program is exempt from public disclosure.

Tribal Young Driver Education Partnership.

Beginning July 1, 2026, and subject to the availability of funds appropriated in the transportation budget for this purpose, the DOL must establish a program to partner with tribal governments to provide young driver education and training in tribal communities. The DOL must provide an implementation plan for the program to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by January 1, 2026. Beginning July 1, 2027, and on a biennial basis thereafter, the DOL is required to report on tribal partnership program activities to the appropriate committees of the Legislature.

Certain Department of Licensing Fees and Traffic Camera Revenue.

Beginning January 1, 2026, the fee to obtain a driver's instruction permit is raised \$10, to \$35; and the fee for the exam to obtain a new driver's license is raised by \$15, to \$50. The fee increases of \$10 and \$15, respectively, must be deposited into the Driver Education Safety Improvement Account (Driver Education Account). The license service fee assessed at the time of vehicle registration is raised by 25 cents, to 75 cents. This fee increase must be deposited into the Driver Education Account.

Any revenue generated from the deployment of speed safety camera systems that exceeds the operating and administrative costs of these camera systems must also be transferred to the Driver Education Account. A portion of the LeMay-America's Car Museum special license plate fee revenue, as specified in House Bill 1368 or Senate Bill 5444, must be deposited into the Driver Education Account as well.

Expenditures from the Driver Education Account may only be used for expanding and improving driver's education programs and activities including, but not limited to, the driver training school instructor education opportunities program, the driver training education course voucher program, and the tribal partnership program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date: The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.