

## Comments to the Minor Driver's License Interim Study Committee

- Even though young driver fatal crashes have improved over the past 20 years, young drivers are still nearly four times more likely to be involved in a fatal traffic crash than their older counterparts and are overrepresented in fatal crashes relative to adults.
- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Iowa had the highest percentage of young driver fatalities in the nation in 2020.
- Young drivers are the riskiest age group on the road, and the reasons are straightforward – immaturity and inexperience.
- A young person's brain isn't fully developed until the early to mid-twenties, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which controls risk assessment and decision-making. And, many young drivers don't have enough driving experience to recognize risk and take the appropriate corrective action to prevent a crash.
- This means that once adolescents get behind the wheel;
  1. They have difficulty keeping their attention on the task of driving.
  2. They have difficulty understanding all the stimuli in their surroundings and making quick decisions about how to react to hazardous environmental changes.
  3. They may also have a desire to speed, drive aggressively or to get behind the wheel when they are intoxicated.
  4. This also puts them at higher risk of distraction (by passengers, road signs, cell phones), increases their crash risk if there is an unexpected change in the driving environment, and encourages them to drive drunk or high.
- **All of this impacts the safety of everyone on the road, not just the teen behind the wheel.**
- A recent report from the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA) highlights proven policies and programs that research confirms have improved teen driver safety. The top policy and program is the adoption of strong graduated driver license laws (GDL).
  1. **Strong Graduated Driver License (GDL) laws.** Every state has a GDL program, which phases in driving privileges for teens and imposes restrictions, such as banning nighttime driving or limiting the number of peers in the vehicle.
    - All 50 states have adopted Graduated Driver Licensing laws. Iowa's Minor School License is a departure from the traditional Graduated Driver License model and is only one of three states that allow a minor to drive unaccompanied at age 14 ½.
    - Iowa's minimum age to obtain a learner permit is 14 years old. Current best practices in the United States is a minimum learner permit age of 16 and at least 70 supervised practice hours, a minimum intermediate license age of 17, and, during the intermediate stage, a night driving restriction starting at 8 p.m. and a ban on all teen passengers.

Expanding driving privileges for young drivers by allowing them to drive unsupervised, without time to gain experience, thus exposing them to dangerous driving situations, would move Iowa further from evidence based best practices.