

**Testimony in Support of HB 1194**  
**House Transportation Committee – Jan. 21, 2021**  
**Gene LaDoucer, AAA-The Auto Club Group**

Good morning, Chairman Ruby and members of the committee. My name is Gene LaDoucer, and I represent AAA-The Auto Club Group and our nearly 70,000 members in North Dakota.

Thanks to changes made to the licensing system during the 2011 legislative session (HB 1256) fewer of our state's children have been injured or killed in traffic crashes. A review of state crash data through 2019 shows the four-year average of fatal and injury crashes involving 15-year-old drivers are down 30 percent. And the ratio of injury crashes involving 14-17 year-olds to the share of licensed drivers is down 19 percent.

While the trend is positive, the fact remains that teen drivers in North Dakota account for five percent of all licensed drivers in North Dakota, but were behind the wheel in nearly 20 percent of all crashes and 12 percent of fatal crashes over the past five years. We believe a couple of key updates to the licensing rules would lead to even fewer crashes, injuries and deaths involving our children.

For a licensing system to be effective, it must first be clearly understood and the requirements consistently applied. It must also be built on a solid foundation of quality education and practical hands-on experience. The current process comes up short for minors over 15 years of age.

As an example, the process is different for a teen who starts at age 14 than one who starts at age 15; however, they can both earn their unrestricted license at age 16. Furthermore, a teen who starts the process at age 16 can be awarded a license only six months later, at age 16 years and six months.

The process for a teen who starts the licensing process at age 14 is generally solid, except for the absence of a passenger limit during the intermediate licensing phase. Currently, they must hold a permit for 12 months; complete driver's education; and pass through a graduated licensing phase, which includes a limit on night driving. At age 16 they are then awarded an unrestricted license.

A teen who begins the process on their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, would need to hold a permit for 12 months and complete driver's education, but would not be required to pass through the graduated license phase. Finally, a 16 or 17 year old would only need to hold a permit for six months. There would be no requirement for either driver's education or completion of the intermediate license phase.

The objective of HB 1287 is threefold:

- 1) Create consistency in the licensing process for all new minor drivers. To do so, it must include completion of driver's education and the intermediate license phase, which promotes experience and responsibility under conditions of less risk.
- 2) Address the risk passengers create for newly licensed drivers by including a limit on the number of passengers during the intermediate license phase.
- 3) Lessen the penalty for violating restrictions of an intermediate license to put it more in line with the penalty for adult drivers.

AAA believes an educated driver is a more effective decision-maker. The ever-increasing demands of the highway traffic system—more drivers, more vehicles, more stress—underscore the need for a

better driver education and training system. Novice drivers particularly need rigorous instruction and training to develop safe driving practices, and improvement of perceptual abilities and management of time and space in traffic. This can best be achieved through professional and highly trained instructors, the availability of uniform driver education and training content, individualized instruction and gradual introduction into the driving system.

A limit on the number of passengers during the intermediate license phase is needed to address a significant risk to new drivers. Distractions are a major problem for teen drivers. A recent AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety study found distractions are a contributing factor in 60 percent of teen crashes in the United States. Among the distractions identified, teen passengers were the top distraction. Cell phones were the second most cited distraction. Furthermore, a AAA study found crash risk for new drivers increased 44 percent with one passenger younger than 21; doubled with two passengers younger than 21; and quadrupled for 3 passengers younger than 21.

It should be noted that North Dakota is one of only three states without a passenger restriction during the intermediate license phase. The others are Florida and Mississippi. Among our neighboring states, Minnesota and Montana have a limit of one teen passenger for the first six months, while South Dakota doesn't allow any passengers for the first six months. All have exclusions for immediate family members.

Parents also overwhelmingly support a passenger restriction. A 2010 survey of 1,000 North Dakota parents with teens asked "Do you think North Dakota should limit newly licensed teen drivers to no more than one teen passenger?" Eighty-six percent said "yes," including 79% from rural areas.

Finally, this bill would lower the penalty for violating a restriction of the intermediate license. Currently the penalty is the same as for adults – 4 points – despite adults being able to accumulate 12 points before losing their license. It would also reclassify it as a non-criminal moving violation, whereas it is currently a criminal non-moving violation. The recommended 2-point penalty is better suited for teens who lose their license after accumulating six points.

The licensing of young drivers presents a challenge for all of us. Although the vast majority of teens are responsible and caring, they are all inexperienced drivers. The fact remains that the roadways are the most dangerous place for them to be, and we owe it to them to properly equip them to meet that challenge.

It is clear we're on the right track with improving the state's licensing system for teen drivers. The track now necessitates consistent application of the rules. Rules that stress quality education and practical hands-on experience. There is a better way. Now it's time to implement it.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, we owe it to our children to provide a licensing environment where they can develop into safe and responsible drivers in a manner that reduces their risk and the risk to others. On behalf of AAA--The Auto Club Group, I urge a "Do Pass" recommendation on HB 1194.

*AAA-The Auto Club Group (ACG) is a membership based, non-profit corporation operating in fourteen states and two US Territories. It is one of the largest American Automobile Association (AAA) clubs in the United States with approximately 14 million members. ACG provides travel, insurance, automotive, and financial services to its members. In North Dakota, AAA – The Auto Club Group serves more than 69,000 members and works to represent the interests of members and the traveling public in the state legislature.*



## Teen Licensing: Three-Stage System Stressing Experience, Responsibility

	Recommended Policy	Current North Dakota Policy	Proposed North Dakota Policy
<b>Stages</b>	3-stage process for all novice drivers under age 18	3-stage process for all novice drivers under age 16	3-stage process for all novice drivers under age 18
<b>Permit Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 16 years old</li> <li>6-month holding period</li> <li>Drivers education required for all novice drivers</li> <li>Minimum of 50 hours of supervised practice</li> <li>Must be accompanied by a licensed driver over age 20</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 14 years old</li> <li>12-months holding period if under age 16; 6-month holding period if age 16 or older</li> <li>Drivers education required if under age 16</li> <li>Minimum of 50 hours of supervised practice</li> <li>Must be accompanied by a licensed driver at least age 18</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change</li> <li>12-month holding period if under age 18</li> <li>Drivers education required if under age 18</li> <li>No change</li> <li>No change</li> </ul>
<b>Restricted License</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6-month holding period</li> <li>Night driving restricted between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. for 6 months (with exceptions)</li> <li>No more than 1 non-family passenger under age 21 for 6 months</li> <li>No cell phone use</li> <li>Must complete 6 months without at-fault crash or traffic conviction before progressing to the next stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold until age 16</li> <li>Night driving restricted between 9 p.m. or sunset, whichever is later, and 5 a.m. for 6 months (with exceptions)</li> <li>No policy on number of teen passengers</li> <li>No cell phone use</li> <li>No policy</li> <li>Violation of license restriction: 4 pts + \$20 (criminal, non-moving violation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6-month holding period if under age 18</li> <li>No change</li> <li>No more than 1 non-family passenger under age 18 for 6 months</li> <li>No change</li> <li>Must complete 6 months without license cancellation.</li> <li>Violation of intermediate license restriction: 2 pts + \$20 (non-criminal, moving)</li> </ul>
<b>Standard License</b>	Minimum age of 17	Minimum age of 16	Minimum age of 15 years, 6 months

