



June 10, 2016

Honorable Bob Huff  
State Capitol Room 3048  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Huff:

We write in support of SB1223, which will continue California's leadership role on transportation safety involving our kids. The bill will help to make the state's teen driver's license law consistent with the data and trends affecting all who share California's roads and highways. The legislation is important because it would resolve a serious flaw in the state's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) law. We note that teen driving is among the Ten Top issues identified by the California Unintentional Injury Prevention Strategic Plan Project.

The idea behind GDL laws is to gradually build the experience of new, teen drivers before obtaining full driving privileges. As California law stands today, a teen can reach the first rung of the GDL ladder at age 15½ and then undergo the three-step GDL program which involves thorough driver's education and supervised driving. GDL laws also place limits on conditions which can challenge a new driver such as night driving and operating a car with young, non-family passengers in the car who can be a distraction. However, a teen can avoid the commitment of the GDL ladder by waiting until they reach age 18 and obtain a full driver's license without the education, experience or restrictions required by law. There is nothing magical about reaching one's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in terms of needing experience as a new, young driver.

We took a snapshot of the California fatality rates of drivers 16-20, and found that the rate steadily climbed by age: the rate was 3% for 17-year olds but 8.4% for 20-year-olds ([see below](#)).\* Further, the following data provides strong evidence of the negative implications of the loophole:

- Among the eight major causes of unintentional injury in California, car crashes in which a teen is behind the wheel is number one.
- The fatality rate for teens who bypass the GDL law is 45% higher than their younger peers.
- GDL programs are associated with a 38 percent reduction in the rate of fatal crashes involving 16-year-old drivers.
- The Insurance Institute of Highway Safety (IIHS) estimates that if all 50 states had the strictest possible GDL law, it could save about 500 lives a year and prevent 9,500 crashes by 15- to 17-year-old drivers.

In May 2016, Safe Kids Worldwide released a breakthrough report, [“Reducing Risks for Teen Drivers,”](#) which demonstrates that the experience envisioned under strong GDL laws is fundamentally important. These measures include at least 50 hours of on-the-road supervised practice, nighttime curfews, limits on non-family teen passengers, and zero tolerance for smartphone use and/or driving under the influence of alcohol. It is based on a survey of 753 pairs of a parent and a new teen driver, inquiring about what a parent expects and what a teen thinks and knows about operating a motor vehicle. The need for experience is at the heart of SB1223.

We are sensitive that the night driving and non-family passenger restrictions for teens 18-20 can be more challenging for this age group because they might interfere with the employment and school obligations of these older drivers. However, we believe the bill is carefully crafted to accommodate the older drivers.

Every state has a GDL system, but every state can make them stronger. We applaud you for working to do this in California. We hope that SB1223 clears the Committee and advances to the floor for final passage.

Sincerely,

Safe Kids California, Helen Arbogast  
 Safe Kids Los Angeles West, Chantel Ponder  
 Safe Kids Central Valley, Kristina Pasma  
 Safe Kids Inland Empire, Michelle Parker  
 Safe Kids San Diego, Mary Beth Moran  
 Safe Kids Orange County, Amy Frias

### Snapshot of Fatalities Involving Drivers Age 16-21

Age	Number of Fatalities	Fatality Rate
16	6	1.23%
17	16	3%
18	31	5.79%
19	38	6.8%
20	49	8.4%
21	64	10.6%

\*Fatalities and fatality rate of teens in California, 2014, ages 16-21. Note that it is possible that driving hours increase as people in this age range get older. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, FARS database