

# KEEPING TEEN DRIVERS & ROADS SAFER

## Policy Brief | February 28, 2024

Motor vehicle crashes involving young drivers accounted for 19% of all deaths and serious injuries in Iowa from 2017-2021.<sup>1</sup> A new 2024 bill (HF 2463) weakens Iowa's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) by authorizing the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) to issue a special minor's restricted work license for student drivers (ages 14-18) to drive to and from their place of employment without adult supervision. Currently, a minor school license (MSL) only allows student drivers to drive to and from school, school activities, and farm work.

- **Expanding driving privileges to young and inexperienced drivers increases their exposure, putting them at greater risk for crashes and making Iowa roads less safe.**

Last year Iowa passed a law (SF 542) that both increased the total work hours and expanded the early morning/late hours teenagers can work. HF 2463 replaces the permitted minor school license hours to drive to and from school/school activities (currently 5am to 10pm) with less restricted hours. Under the bill, student drivers can drive one hour before and after school activities and work shifts.

- **Increasing early/late driving hours increases exposure of young and inexperienced drivers to known crash risk factors, such as driving at night on rural roads.**

## Our teen driving safety research

In 2023, researchers at the University of Iowa Injury Prevention Research Center and the Driving Safety Research Institute summarized their research for the IDOT relevant to an interim study committee charged by the new youth employment law to examine teen driving in Iowa.

We found that the youngest Iowa drivers (ages 14 and 15) had a crash rate of 8 per 1000 teens from 2001-2013. In addition, teen crashes and injuries from crashes increased as roads became more rural.<sup>2</sup>



## Iowa teen drivers with the least experience are more likely to be at fault for crashes, including fatal crashes.

We linked crash data from the IDOT and traffic-related data from Iowa Courts for years 2016-2019. We found that the chances of being at fault for a crash were 32% higher for minor school license (MSL) drivers (ages 14.5-16) and 15% higher for intermediate license drivers relative to drivers with unrestricted (full) licenses. The youngest drivers (age 14) involved in crashes were the most often at fault (73%), followed by age 15 (71%), age 16 (70%) and age 17 (66%).<sup>3</sup> MSL drivers accounted for a greater proportion of teen crashes resulting in fatal and suspected serious/major injuries than expected and were over-represented in these crashes by about 25%.

<sup>1</sup>Iowa's 5-Year Strategic Highway Plan 2024-2028; <sup>2</sup>Characteristics of crashes and injuries among 14- and 15-year-old drivers, by rurality, 2020; <sup>3</sup>Rates and predictors of teen driver crash culpability, 2023; <sup>4</sup>Direct medical charges of all parties in teen-involved crashes by culpability, 2023

### Medical costs are higher for other parties involved in teen-involved crashes where teen drivers are at fault.

We analyzed estimated direct hospitalization and emergency department charges for teen-involved crashes (2016-2020) by teen culpability (being at fault). We linked Iowa police crash reports with Iowa emergency department and Iowa hospital inpatient data and compared charges for the teen drivers (ages 14-17), passengers, and occupants of other vehicles.

In this study sample, 62% of teen drivers in teen-involved crashes were at fault and 38% were not at fault. There was a total of \$20.5 million in inpatient charges from crashes where teen drivers were at fault. \$9.5 million (46.3%) were medical costs for the injured teen driver and \$11 million (53.7%) were medical costs for other involved parties.<sup>4</sup> This study did not breakdown the ages of the teen drivers.

### Graduated Drivers Licensing (GDL)

GDL has been shown to significantly reduce car crashes among teen drivers. Iowa's GDL was established in 1999 through the advocacy of safety organizations. This licensing system helps teens gain driving experience in less risky environments and they gradually earn more driving privileges. In Iowa, current GDL has new drivers move through stages of supervised driving (instructional permit), restricted driving (intermediate license), and full licensing (no restrictions). A minor school license in Iowa (before the intermediate license) is optional and allows teens as young as 14.5 years to drive unsupervised to and from school and school activities from 5am to 10pm.



Some driver license components	Current Minor's School License	Proposed Minor's License (school and work)
<b>Permissions and Certification</b>	Certification of special need from school	Certification of enrollment in courses or extracurricular activities from school  Parent/guardian written consent if application is for work or farm-related work
<b>Hours allowed</b>	5:00am to 10:00pm	No specific hours; driving is allowed one hour before and after school activity or work shift
<b>Destinations allowed</b>	Most direct routes to and from school, school activities, bus stop or service station, farm work	Most direct routes to and from school, school activities, bus stop or service station, all work
<b>Distance allowed</b>	Up to 50 miles (or more with exceptions)	Up to 25 miles (or more with exceptions)
<b>Hand-held electronic devices</b>	Not allowed	Not allowed
<b>Passengers allowed</b>	One unrelated minor	One unrelated minor
<b>Citations for violations of minor license restrictions</b>	Violations are <u>not</u> considered moving violations.	Violations are considered moving violations.
<b>Suspension and revocation</b>	No specific time period of suspension specified or issuance of intermediate license following a suspension  IDOT should revoke minor license if evidence of conviction of 2+ violations and new license cannot be issued for at least 30 days.	License suspensions should be for 3 months. As a result of suspension, IDOT should not issue intermediate license for 3 months following the person's 16 <sup>th</sup> birthday.  Proposed law drops requirement of IDOT to revoke license for 2+ convictions on violations.

Table 1. Comparison of current minor school license to the proposed minor

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