

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 362 (Delegate Holmes)
Environmental Matters

Vehicle Laws - Driver Examination - Practice Driving Requirements

This bill requires an individual who holds a learner's instructional permit and seeks to obtain an original driver's license to complete at least 40 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction supervised by a driver education instructor.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's changes could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Meaningful. Small driving schools would see an increase in demand for lessons, which would increase their revenues.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill specifies that at least:

- 10 hours of driving instruction take place during the period beginning 30 minutes before sunset and ending 30 minutes after sunrise;
- 10 hours take place during inclement weather conditions that the driver's education instructor determines are not unreasonably dangerous; and
- 10 hours occur on nonholiday weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m., or between 3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

The bill allows supervised driving practice that is applicable to more than one requirement to be credited toward fulfillment of each requirement to which it applies.

Current Law: An individual seeking to obtain an original driver's license must attend a driver education program consisting of at least 30 hours of classroom instruction and at least 6 hours of highway driving.

In addition, by regulation, in order for an applicant to obtain a provisional license, a parent, guardian, or supervising driver must submit a completed and signed practice log documenting at least 40 hours of supervised driving.

Background: Teenagers, the majority holders of provisional driver's licenses, have a higher risk of being in an accident than older drivers due primarily to inexperience. About 20% of 16-year-old drivers will be involved in an accident in their first year of driving, with the highest accident rate being in the first month.

Night driving is especially hazardous for teenage drivers. While only 15% of miles driven by 16-year-old and 17-year-old drivers occur between 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., approximately 40% of their fatal crashes occur during this time. Factors that account for this increase can be a greater likelihood of alcohol consumption during these hours, fatigue, and dim lighting conditions.

All 50 states offer a learner's instructional permit. Most states require some amount of supervised driving before proceeding to the next stage. For example:

- 35 states and the District of Columbia require supervised driving:
 - 1 state requires 100 hours;
 - 23 states (including Maryland) require between 40 and 50 hours;
 - 11 states require 20 to 39 hours;
 - 1 state requires 12 hours;
 - 3 states (Nebraska, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) waive their supervised driving requirement if the individual has completed an approved driver's education course, while two states (Georgia and Oregon) reduce the requirement if the driver has completed driver's education; and
- 22 states and the District of Columbia require some night or inclement weather driving before an individual can receive a driver's license. (The District of Columbia requires night driving in the intermediate stage before one can receive an unrestricted driver's license.)

Maryland does not currently pay for driver's education training in public high schools. Under this bill, parents would have to pay for an additional 40 hours of driving time with a qualified instructor.

Small Business Effect: There are approximately 118 driving schools in the State, some of which have branches in multiple counties. Driving schools would have more learner's permit holders as customers seeking behind-the-wheel lessons. While classroom work can be done in a group, behind-the-wheel lessons require individual time. Although driving schools would receive more revenue, they would also probably need to hire additional personnel. Most schools are in densely populated counties such as Baltimore City, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, and Montgomery counties. Smaller counties have fewer schools, and schools in those counties would probably be affected more.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

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