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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

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Children, Youth, and Families

Senate Chair, Legislative Ethics



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for Senate Bill 856
Motor Vehicles – Driver’s Licenses - Eligibility
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 4, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Smith and members of the committee.

In December, our office was approached by the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives (NCIA)—which operates in District 44—with a request to review current requirements and examine legislation to modernize Maryland’s driver’s licensing requirements. NCIA operates vocational and workforce development programs that support individuals seeking stable employment in high-demand industries, including construction, logistics, warehousing, automotive trades, and public safety. Many of their participants are highly motivated adults who are ready and able to work but are systematically excluded from opportunity due to Maryland’s uniquely burdensome licensing requirements.

Maryland uses a Graduated Licensing System called the "Rookie Driver" program. The process consists of three main stages. First is the Learner’s Permit, which requires the individual to be at least 15 years and 9 months old, pass a vision screening, and pass a 25-question written knowledge test. Next is the provisional license, which can be obtained at 16 years and 6 months, and maintains a multiplicity of requirements, including:

- Completion of a Maryland-approved Driver Education course (30 hours of classroom, 6 hours behind-the-wheel).
- Complete a supervised practice log (60 hours if under 25; 14 hours if 25+).
- Holding the Learner's Permit for a specific period (9 months for minors; 45 days for adults 25+).
- Passing the Driving Skills Test at the MVA.

Finally, after holding the provisional driver’s license for 18 months without *any* traffic convictions, the individual becomes eligible for an official driver’s license.

While the vast majority of states have a three-stage graduated program, Maryland is one of the only states in the country that requires an 18-month provisional license requirement for new adult drivers. The majority of states grant full licenses at adulthood (or earlier) after completion of training requirements.

NCIA brought to our attention that during this period, many employers will not hire adults holding provisional licenses due to insurance restrictions that require a full drivers license. This effectively creates an 18-month delay to employment for otherwise qualified adults.

The majority of participants in NCIA's programs do not currently have licenses. Even for adults over 25 exempted from 60 hours of supervised driving practice, the journey to a full license can take nearly two years, even when they are responsible and capable.

Senate Bill 856 (SB 856) provides a legislative remedy to this workforce barrier by amending the current law to eliminate the 18-month provisional requirement for Marylanders over the age of 18 years old. They still must complete all of the other statutory requirements, including driver's education, supervised practice, and passing the driving skills test at the MVA.

I have with me one amendment to fix a drafting error in the original bill and maintain the same age categories and practice requirements as exist in current law. The only difference being that only people under the age of 18 will receive provisional licenses; everyone else over 18 would qualify for a regular license immediately after completion of the existing statutory requirements.

In conclusion, SB 856 will align Maryland's drivers licensing system with most other states in the country by removing the burdensome 18-month provisional license requirement for adults that is limiting Maryland employers from filling critical roles at a time when workforce shortages continue to be a major economic concern.

For these reasons, I request a favorable report on SB 856.