



Testimony on the Transportation Budget – Sub. HB 53
Kathy Bernstein – Senior Manager, National Safety Council
Senate Transportation, Commerce and Labor Committee
March 10, 2015

Chairwoman Manning, Ranking Member Cafaro and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today on the biennial transportation budget (HB 53). My name is Kathy Bernstein and I am the Senior Manager for Teen Driving Safety Initiatives at the National Safety Council (NSC). The National Safety Council is a 100 year-old congressionally chartered nonprofit safety organization dedicated to saving lives by preventing injuries and deaths at work, in homes, in communities, and on roads through leadership, research, education and advocacy. Our 14,000 member companies represent over 8 million employees at more than 51,000 work sites, including right here in Ohio.

I plan to focus my testimony today on the “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” proposal that was developed by the Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS) and offered in the introduced version of the transportation budget. I would like to commend Governor Kasich and Director Born for their efforts to prevent tragedies on Ohio's roadways, especially those involving our most inexperienced drivers. Unfortunately, many of the lifesaving proposals included in the “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” initiative were removed in the House of Representatives. I am here today to urge the Senate to reinstate this language, especially the provisions that would enhance Ohio's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) system, and in doing so help protect our youngest drivers.

As many of you are aware, motor vehicle crashes are the number one killer of American teenagers, and figures show that teenagers, based on miles driven, have a fatal crash rate four times higher than drivers 25 to 69. Evidence shows that those drivers between 16- and 18-years-old, remain more susceptible to deadly crashes than others on the road. These drivers not only lack the experience of older drivers, but they also tend to take greater risks, a combination that has proven deadly, and puts everyone on the road in danger. In Ohio, teens represent only 5% of all licensed drivers, yet are in almost 17% of all crashes, 19% of crashes involving injuries, and 13% of all fatal crashes.

One effort to help curb this problem has been the implementation of GDL systems, which have been proven to reduce crash risks for new drivers. GDL programs allow teenage drivers to safely gain driving experience before obtaining full driving privileges. Ohio's current GDL system was developed in 2007, and it includes a combination of nighttime driving limits, passenger restrictions, and advanced penalties for teen drivers violating the law. The steps taken in 2007 helped save lives; however, these provisions have not been revisited since that time. The “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” initiative proposes important changes to Ohio's GDL system, changes that are proven to reduce crashes and save lives.

The “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” proposal would make several important improvements that I would like to highlight:



First, it would implement a passenger restriction for all drivers under the age of 18. The current GDL system prohibits 16-year-old drivers from driving with more than one passenger. Nevertheless, this passenger restriction is lifted once the driver turns 17, regardless of how long that driver has a license. The proposal being offered by DPS would apply this one-passenger restriction to all those under 18, while maintaining the current exemption for family members. This change will allow all those under the age of 18 to gain valuable experience behind the wheel before adding unnecessary distractions. It is important to note that when a teen driver has another young person in the car the risk of a fatal crash increases by 44%, with one more passenger the risks doubles, and with three or more passengers the risk of a fatal accident quadruples.

The “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” initiative would also require a holder of a probationary driver's license found guilty of a moving violation be accompanied by a parent or guardian for a period of six months, with a provision allowing a juvenile court to make exceptions for any hardships, including school and work activities. While this provision already exists for those drivers under the age of 17, the change would simply and appropriately apply this provision to all drivers under the age of 18. This will ensure that our youngest drivers, guilty of a moving violation, have added supervision while they are still learning the skills necessary to be a safe driver.

NSC also applauds the efforts by the administration to address the problem of distracted driving for all drivers on Ohio's roadways. The “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” initiative would also classify “distracted driving” as a secondary offense, which enhances the criminal penalties for moving violations. Fines from these penalties will be deposited in the newly created “Driver Education Fund”, which will be used to fund additional driver safety programs.

The “Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” initiative also attempts to clarify the current, but confusing, nighttime driving restriction for those drivers under 18 years of age. Under current law, teenage drivers have two different standards: 16-year-olds cannot drive after midnight, and 17-year-olds are restricted from driving after 1:00 A.M. This two-tiered system is confusing and needs to be improved. The administration is proposing to simplify this provision, by creating a midnight standard for all drivers under the age of 18.

While the NSC supports clarifying this section, current data shows most accidents involving young drivers happen well before midnight. In fact, according to data by the Ohio Department of Transportation for the years 2007-2011, 76% of nighttime crashes involving young drivers occurred before midnight. Therefore, instead of midnight, we would suggest moving the nighttime driving limit to an earlier time when data shows the highest number of incidences occur. We would ask the committee to consider further improving this section by creating a 10:00 P.M. nighttime driving limit. By moving the nighttime restriction to 10:00 P.M. we can help protect young drivers from what data has proven is the most dangerous time of night for them to be on the road. It is important to note that this provision would include exemptions for school and work activities that are currently offered today. I have included in my testimony the data collected by the Ohio Department of Transportation supporting changing the nighttime driving restriction.

Chairwoman Manning and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this extremely important issue. We support the steps that the administration is proposing under the

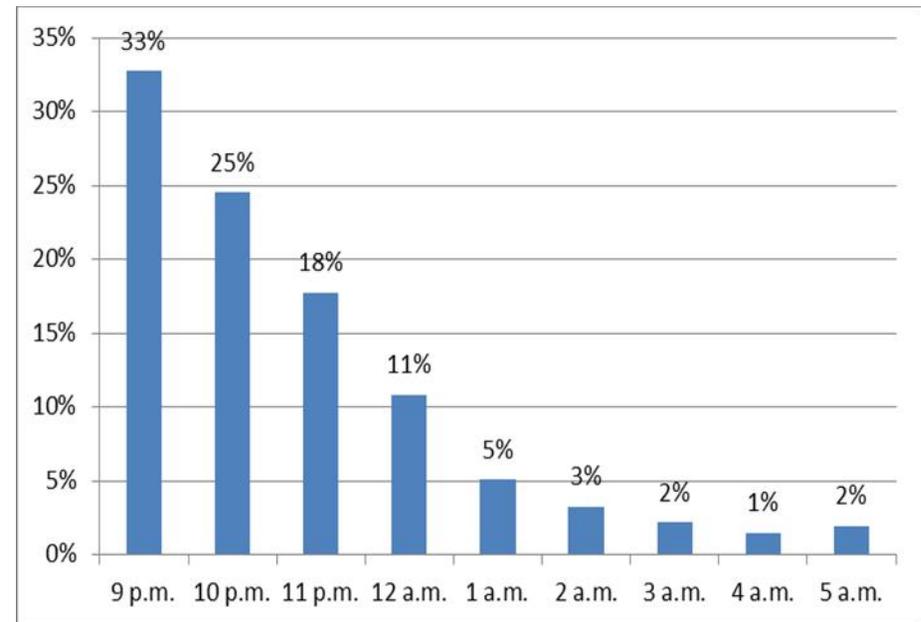
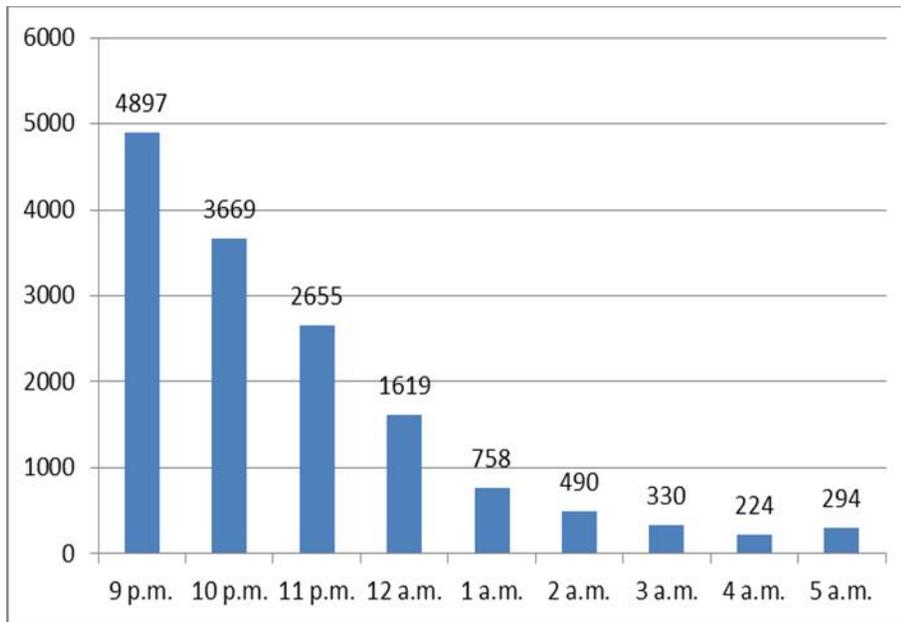


“Drive Toward a Safer Ohio” initiative and urge you to reinstate this language in HB 53. The proposals being offered are modest, practical, and reasonable approaches to enhancing Ohio's licensing laws. If questions surrounding the overall plan remain, I hope you will at least consider adding the GDL components back into the bill. Again, if enacted these steps are proven to save the lives of our youngest drivers. I thank you once again for allowing me to testify and will be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Sincerely,

Kathy Bernstein
National Safety Council

OH 16&17 Year old Driver Crashes by Hour of Night, 2007-2011



Source: Ohio DOT