



Graduated Driver Licenses for Teenagers

Written On May 10, 2010 By Bob Kraft

Graduated driver licenses (GDL) are ones that confer greater freedoms on drivers as they age through their teen years. Texas has graduated drivers licenses now.

An act pending before Congress would compel all states to adopt fairly strict standards for graduated driver licenses, stricter than the current standards in Texas. The rest of this post is information about the proposed law, referred to as STANDUP (for the Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act). Most of this information is taken from the Web site of Allstate Insurance Company, a big proponent of graduated driver licenses.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: A state complies if it has a GDL law that includes, for novice drivers under the age of 21, the following –

- A 3-stage licensing process (learner's permit and intermediate stages before unrestricted driver's license granted starting at age 18;
- A prohibition on nighttime driving during the learner's permit and intermediate stages;

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- A passenger restriction during the learner's permit and intermediate stage (no more than 1 non-familial passenger under the age of 21 unless a licensed driver over 21 years of age is in the vehicle);
- A prohibition on non-emergency use of cell phones and other communication devices during the learner's permit and intermediate stages;
- Age for issuance of learner's permit is 16 and unrestricted license at 18;

DISCRETIONARY REQUIREMENTS: • Any other requirement adopted by the Secretary of Transportation, including at least 30 hours behind-the-wheel, supervised driving by licensed driver 21 years of age or older; automatic delay of full licensure if permit holder commits offense, such as DWI, misrepresentation of true age, reckless driving, unbelted driving, speeding, or other violations as determined by the Secretary.

RULEMAKING: The Secretary shall issue regulations to implement this section.

Section 4: Incentive Grants

For 3 fiscal years following enactment, States complying with the Minimum Requirements section will receive grants based on the same ratio used to apportion funds under the section 402 highway safety program. The annual authorization level is \$25 million for fiscal years 2010 through 2012, to be taken from the Highway Trust Fund.

Section 5: Withholding of Funds for Non-Compliance

For States that do not comply with the minimum requirements section by October 1, 2012, the Secretary shall withhold a percentage of certain federal highway construction program funds otherwise required to be apportioned to that State. The withholding percentage increases each year for the first three years after the incentive grant program ends. Funds withheld for noncompliance in the first two fiscal years of withholding will be returned to States that later come into compliance within three years

following the year for which funds were withheld. Withheld funds that are not recovered by a State within the three-year period, and any other funds withheld for other fiscal years, will be returned to the U.S. Treasury.

The **Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act of 2009** (STANDUP Act) was introduced in April 2009 by Reps. Tim Bishop (D-NY), Michael Castle (R-DE), and Chris Van Hollen, Jr. (D-MD). This legislation would establish minimum federal requirements for state GDL laws and encourage all states to adopt GDL laws that meet those minimum requirements within 3 years.

For 3 years following enactment of the STANDUP Act, states with the minimum GDL requirements would receive grants to help them with GDL education and enforcement.

For states that don't comply with the STANDUP Act minimum requirements within three years, the Secretary of Transportation would withhold a percentage of certain federal highway construction program funds. Funds that are withheld would be returned to states that comply within 3 fiscal years following the fiscal year for which funds were withheld. Withheld funds that are not recovered by a state within the 3-year period would be forfeited and returned to the U.S. Treasury.

Here is an overview of the STANDUP Act:

States must meet the following requirements under the STANDUP Act: **T**hree stages of licensing – learner's permit, intermediate stage, and full licensure – should be used **A**ge 16 should be the earliest age for entry into the learner's permit process **N**ighttime driving while unsupervised should be restricted during the learner's permit and intermediate stages, until full licensure at age 18 **D**riving while using communication devices (cell phone calls, texting) should be prohibited at least until full licensure at age 18 **U**nrestricted, full licensure should occur no earlier than age 18 **P**assengers should

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be restricted – no more than one non-familial passenger under age 21 unless a licensed driver over age 21 is in the vehicle – until full licensure at age 18

Any other requirement adopted by the Secretary of Transportation, such as a minimum duration of 6 months and a minimum of 30 hours of supervised driving for a learner's permit, may be included

Compliance with the requirements within the first three years after enactment will make states eligible for incentive grants

Three years are provided for states to meet the requirements, after which sanctions are imposed to encourage states to meet the requirements

Current Texas Law

In 2008, 650 people were killed in crashes involving teen drivers in Texas. Over the past five years, Texas crashes involving teen drivers claimed 3414 lives. Nationally, since 1999, more than 84,400 people have been killed in crashes involving teen drivers.

Graduated Driver Licensing Laws in Texas

The current GDL law in Texas includes the following components:

- A three-stage licensing system beginning at age 15 for learner's permit, age 16 for the intermediate stage, and age 16 years and 6 months for full licensure
- A mandatory 6 month holding period for the learner's permit stage
- A prohibition on unsupervised nighttime driving between midnight and 5 a.m. during the intermediate stage (secondary enforcement)
- A passenger restriction prohibiting more than one passenger younger than age 21 (secondary enforcement)
- A prohibition on non-emergency use of cell phones, both hand-held and hands-free, during the learner's permit stage and for the first twelve months of the intermediate stage
- A prohibition on texting while driving for the first twelve months of the intermediate stage and for all drivers while in school crossing zones

These changes are needed to improve Texas's GDL law and meet the requirements of the STANDUP Act

- Require age 16 for entry into the learner's permit stage
- Extend restrictions on teen drivers through age 17
- Strengthen the prohibitions on non-emergency use of cell phones and texting while driving by extending them for the entire intermediate stage through age 17

Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 killer of American teens.

In 2007, nearly 3,200 young drivers (ages 15-20) were killed in motor vehicle crashes.

Crashes involving young drivers also claimed the lives of nearly 4,500 other people in 2007 alone:

- More than 2,000 passengers riding with young drivers were killed
- More than 1,800 people in other vehicles were killed
- More than 600 pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-occupants were killed

New teen drivers are more likely to crash than other drivers.

- Teen drivers ages 16 to 19 have a fatality rate four times the rate of drivers ages 25 to 69. Sixteen-year-old drivers have a crash rate three times more than 17-year-olds, 5 times greater than 18-year-olds, and two times that of 85-year-olds.*

Risky behavior lead to crashes, injuries, and deaths.

- In 2007, 26% of young drivers killed in crashes had blood alcohol concentrations of .08 or higher.*
- In 2007, 20.5% of young drivers involved in fatal crashes had previous speeding convictions.*

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Crashes involving young drivers are costly to society.

- The estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between the ages of 15 and 20 was \$40.8 billion in the United States in 2002 alone.*