

e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Emilia Pastina

Will Congress set national rules for teenage drivers?

For many U.S. teens, getting behind the wheel of a car is the ultimate freedom.

But if a bill now before the U.S. Congress becomes law, freedom may have to wait a little bit longer.

It's called the Standup Act — short for the Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act — and it would set the minimum age for getting a learner's permit at 16 and the age for a driver's license at 18, among other standards.

If this bill becomes law, it would be the first of its kind. While, there are national laws for seat belts and the minimum age for drinking, states are free to create their own laws about when teens can get behind a wheel.

Laws vary greatly from state to state. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, only eight states and Washington, D.C. require drivers to be at least 16 to begin driving, and just 10 states say teens must have a learner's permit for more than six months before getting a driver's license.

Some states are even easier on young drivers. New Hampshire, for example, doesn't have a mandatory period for teens to have a learner's permit before receiving a driver's license.

Supporters of the bill believe it could save lives, giving teens more time practicing with experienced drivers before heading out on their own.

However, those against the bill say it unfairly targets teenagers. Other opponents say it should be left up to states to determine what is right for their communities when it comes to driver's licenses.

Teens behind the wheel

Driving may be an exciting activity in a teen's life, but it can also be dangerous. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, motor vehicle accidents are the Number One cause of death for people between 15 and 20 years old.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that about 3,500 U.S. teens between 15 and 19 years old were killed in 2008 motor vehicle accidents, and more than 350,000 were treated in emergency rooms and emergency departments for injuries.

There are many factors that put teen drivers at higher risk.

Among them are a greater tendency to speed and less ability to recognize

dangerous situations than older drivers.

Graduated licensing

The proposed national standards would create a uniform graduated driver's licensing (GDL) policy, which means there would be a learning period before an unrestricted driver's license would be issued.

According to the Saferoads4Teens Coalition, which supports the Standup Act, "strong GDL systems" can reduce the teen vehicle crash rate by up to 40 percent.

Along with age minimums for a learner's permit and driver's license, the standards would also prohibit those with a learner's permit from driving at night, restrict the number and age of passengers, and ban the use of cell phones and other communication devices by teens in cars in non-emergency situations.

The bill could pass on its own, or it may be incorporated in the next version of national highway legislation.

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If the Standup Act becomes law, many teens across the nation would have to wait longer to get driver's permits and driver's licenses.

Talk About the News

- **The Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act, also called the Standup Act, would create national driver's licensing standards. Those in favor say it could save lives. Those against say it unfairly targets teenagers and doesn't account for the diverse attitudes in different areas of the country. As a class, talk about the pros and cons of this bill. How many classmates would sign it, and how many would reject it?**

Learning Standard: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern by clarifying issues, considering opposing views, applying democratic values, anticipating consequences and working toward making decisions.

Explore Your e-Edition



- **According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, motor vehicle accidents are the Number One cause of death for people between 15 and 20 years old. Read today's e-Edition for an article about a motor vehicle accident. How could it have been prevented? Write down five promises teens should make about what they will or will not do when they begin driving.**

Learning Standards: Responding to a variety of oral, visual, written and electronic texts by making connections to students' personal lives and the lives of others; writing fluently for multiple purposes; identifying and explaining how individuals demonstrate good character and personal virtue.

- **Many bills in the U.S. Congress get their start with concerned citizens or groups passionate about an issue. Read today's national or local section of the e-Edition to find an issue facing your community, state or country. Write a proposed law that could help fix the problem. Next, write a letter to a local lawmaker stating why he or she should support such a bill.**

Learning Standards: Posing local, state and national policy issues as questions; evaluating possible resolutions of a public issue; writing fluently for multiple purposes.

- **Distracted driving, such as talking on a cell phone or texting while driving, is a big problem among drivers of all ages. Create a public service ad for the e-Edition that warns customers about the dangers of using communication devices while driving.**

Learning Standard: Reading and writing fluently, speaking confidently, listening and interacting appropriately, viewing critically and representing creatively.

How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about national teen driving standards by answering the questions below.

1. **According to the story, what is another name for the Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act?**
 - A. Graduated Licensing Policy
 - B. Learner's Permit
 - C. Standup Act
 - D. Driver's License
2. **According to the story, this bill proposes that the minimum age to receive a learner's permit be:**
 - A. 15
 - B. 16
 - C. 17
 - D. 18
3. **According to the story, this bill proposes that the minimum age to receive a driver's license be:**
 - A. 15
 - B. 16
 - C. 17
 - D. 18
4. **According to the story, how many teenagers were treated in emergency rooms or departments for injuries from motor vehicle accidents in 2008:**
 - A. 35
 - B. 3,500
 - C. 350,000
 - D. 3,500,000
5. **According to the story, a GDL would require teenagers to first get a:**
 - A. Learner's permit
 - B. Driver's license
 - C. High school diploma
 - D. GED