

The Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act of 2009 (The STANDUP Act – H. R. 1895)

A public health crisis

Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 killer of American teens. On average, more than 10 teens are killed in the United States each day as a result of motor vehicle crashes. In 2007 alone, more than 7,600 people lost their lives in crashes involving young drivers ages 15 to 20. More than 3,100 of these deaths were young drivers, and nearly 2,000 were passengers of young drivers. Since 1999, more than 80,000 people have been killed in the United States as a result of crashes involving teen drivers.

A promising remedy

Research has shown that a Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program is an effective method for reducing the crash risk of new drivers. GDL programs introduce teens to the driving experience gradually by phasing in full driving privileges over time and in lower risk settings. Optimal GDL laws have multiple components, including a three-stage licensing process and restrictions on nighttime driving, number and age of passengers, and cell phone usage. Research shows that states with strong GDL laws have experienced a reduction in teen driver crashes of up to 40%.

The need for federal action

State GDL laws vary widely with regard to the components included and the strength of the restrictions. This has resulted in an uneven patchwork of stronger and weaker GDL laws across the nation. The federal practice of withholding a percentage of Highway Trust Fund monies from states until they have adopted key lifesaving highway safety laws – known as “sanctions” – has worked effectively to speed up the process of passing state laws and create a uniform safety policy across all 50 states and D.C. This practice has been successful on a number of important issues, such as establishing 21 as the minimum legal drinking age; establishing the allowable blood alcohol concentration level for drivers at .08%; and establishing a zero tolerance policy for underage drinking and driving. With the use of federal sanctions, all 50 states passed these laws in the time allowed, and no state lost money. Even more importantly, these laws are credited with saving more than 25,000 lives. Using this approach to improve state GDL laws would ultimately lead to a reduction in teen driver crashes and related deaths.

The Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act of 2009 (STANDUP Act) would establish minimum requirements for state GDL laws:

- A 3-stage licensing process (learner’s permit and intermediate stage before unrestricted driver’s license);
- A prohibition on nighttime driving during the learner’s permit and intermediate stages;
- 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, including text messaging, during the learner’s permit and intermediate stages;
- Age 16 for issuance of learner’s permit and age 18 for lifting of all restrictions on newly-licensed teen drivers;
- Any other requirement adopted by the Secretary of Transportation, including learner’s permit holding period at least 6 months; intermediate stage at least 6 months; 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 an offense, such as DWI, misrepresentation of true age, reckless driving, unbelted driving, speeding, or other violations as determined by the Secretary.

The STANDUP Act

The purpose of the STANDUP Act is to provide safety grants to states with qualifying GDL laws and urge all states to adopt GDL laws that meet specific minimum requirements within 3 years.

For 3 years following enactment of the STANDUP Act, states complying with the defined minimum requirements 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 States that do not comply with the minimum requirements section within three years of enactment, 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.