

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

April 2, 1998

### **Teen Driving Bill Passes House**

Teenage drivers take note! Last week the house of representatives passed a bill that extends the process of becoming a fully licensed driver in Massachusetts, an action that will provide a level of serenity for parents at the same time it dismays the eager students who have been counting the days till they turn sixteen and a half.

The bill was sent to the senate, so at this time it is not an accomplished fact. Here are my reasons for supporting the changes along with some provisions of the bill.

The teen drivers that I have talked with have absolute confidence in their ability behind the wheel. Registry statistics however tell another story. According to Registry of Motor Vehicle statistics, 50 percent of 16 year-olds are involved in a motor vehicle collision before they turn 17. I certainly knew that inexperience made the new drivers a higher risk for insurance carriers, but I was surprised that half of them have accidents in their first driving year.

The statistics concerning fatalities is consistent with teens' high accident rate. Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among teenagers.

This bill requires teens to gain experience behind the wheel in a controlled manner, under the supervision of a parent or guardian. If enacted into law, it will save lives and provide increased protection for every passenger and driver on the road.

Here are some of the changes included in the bill:

Junior drivers must have a learner's permit for at least 6 months, with 6 months free of at-fault accidents, moving violations, drug or alcohol convictions.

In addition to driver's education they need 12 hours of supervised driving certified by a parent or guardian. Persons operating with a learner's permit must be accompanied by a driver at least 21 years of age (instead of the current 18 years). For the first 6 months of licensure no passenger under 18 may be carried unless there is a passenger over age 18 in the front of the seat.

Speeding carries a suspension after the second offense; O.U.I. or driving to endanger carry automatic suspensions of at least 180 days.

To answer one question that has already been put to me: a "grandfather clause" exempts permitted drivers from the 6 month incident-free permit period and the 12 hours of additional supervised driving.

Several students have questioned the prohibition against driving without an 18 year-old in the front seat, a provision that would prohibit the new driver from transporting classmates to school. Others are concerned about the overall strictness of licensure. Naturally, they do not believe that they would fall into the half of their peers that will be involved in accidents. I am interested in other comments me know your thoughts with a phone call, a note or email [Mrogeness@aol.com](mailto:Mrogeness@aol.com).