

More training

Teen drivers need more and better training to reduce accidents

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A Senate subcommittee approved a bill this week that would save lives on South Carolina's roads by requiring additional training before teenagers get their driver's licenses.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Columbia, would require teenagers to take an additional four-hour course on defensive driving.

Lourie says the criteria for the course would be established by the Department of Public Safety, but he has modeled his proposal on an "Alive at 25" course sponsored by the National Safety Council. Lourie says he was impressed by the effectiveness of the course in Colorado. After it was mandated for new drivers there, it significantly lowered teen fatalities.

Most South Carolinians know of a fatal accident involving a 15-year-old or 16-year-old driver, but the evidence that these young drivers need more training is more than anecdotal. Over the past three years, 15- and 16-year-old drivers caused or contributed to 6,540 accidents in South Carolina. While drivers age 16-24 make up only 14 percent of the drivers on the roads, they cause 28 percent of the collisions.

Lourie is right to think that the state should require more training for these drivers before turning them loose on the roads.

The state recognized the danger young and inexperienced drivers pose when it instituted the new graduated licensing system. Lawmakers acknowledged that South Carolina no longer has the simple farm-to-market road system it had when it first decided to issue licenses to 15-year-olds. Today's highway system is much more complicated and congested. Lawmakers tried to ease teenagers into that system through the graduated system, but more training is still necessary.

The course the bill would require could be added to driver education classes offered in schools, and it could be given by private driver training businesses. Fifteen schools in the state already offer the course.

This is not an esoteric policy matter for lawmakers. Motorists are dying on the state's roads. The Palmetto State has one of the highest accident rates in the nation. And some of those who die are our teenagers. That's a tragedy we can't ignore.

Requiring this course won't be painless. It will take schools a while before they can incorporate it into their offerings. It may require some future motorists to attend a private driving school. But it's worth it.

There is every reason to require more training for young drivers and no good reason not to do so.



Senate panel approves more training for state's youngest drivers

Posted:

Updated:

COLUMBIA, SC (AP) - The state's youngest drivers would have to go through more training before getting a regular license under a bill that has won approval in a Senate panel.

Senator Joel Lourie says requiring four hours of private driver's training will help reduce the number of teenage drivers involved in accidents. He says statistics show drivers between the ages of 16 and 24 are involved in 28 percent of accidents.

Public schools teaching driver training courses could include the additional hours in their courses. The National Safety Council says the program costs \$35 and that 15 South Carolina high schools already use it.

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