

**Parents' Views of Licensing
Practices in Connecticut**

Susan A. Ferguson
Allan F. Williams

June 1996

**INSURANCE INSTITUTE
FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY**

1005 NORTH GLEBE ROAD ARLINGTON, VA 22201

PHONE 703/247-1500 FAX 703/247-1678

www.iihs.org

INTRODUCTION

Young drivers are at a very high risk of crash involvement during their first few years of driving. Yet in most U.S. states, gaining access to full-privilege licensure is very easy (Williams et al., 1996). Licensure typically is allowed at age 16, and only a minority of states require learners to obtain a permit and hold it for any length of time prior to licensure. In states that do require a learner's permit, the holding period currently ranges from 14 to 90 days. The result of this easy access to licenses among 16 year-olds is a rate of 43 crashes per million miles driven compared with 30 among 17 year-olds, 15 among 18-19 year-olds, 10 among 20-24 year-olds, and 5 crashes per million miles driven among drivers age 25 and older (Williams, 1996).

Recognizing that learning to drive is a long-term undertaking, several states are considering graduated licensing for young beginning drivers. The goal is to gradually phase in exposure to increasingly complex driving tasks and environments. Under this system, a beginning driver progresses through an extended period of supervised driving followed by a restricted license that limits when, where, and/or with whom a young driver can legally drive. At the end of this period, the young driver may obtain an unrestricted license.

Graduated licensing is in place in other countries, and on July 1, 1996, Florida will become the first U.S. state to adopt such a system. Other states are considering graduated licensing in their legislatures, and a number of states already have enacted one component of a graduated system: a mandatory six-month holding period for learner's permits.

In their most recent legislative session, Connecticut legislators considered various components of a graduated licensing system, including a nighttime driving curfew. They enacted a law requiring beginners to obtain learner's permits to be held for six months, which will essentially delay access to a full-privilege license in Connecticut from 16 years to 16 years and 6 months. Until this new licensing law takes effect, the state has no learner's permit. Instead, beginning drivers are allowed to practice behind the wheel at age 16, and they can get unrestricted licenses after completing driver education or with home training from parents.

Support for graduated licensing and its components generally is high among parents of teenagers. A recent national survey of 1,000 parents of 17 year-olds, the majority of whom had already been through the licensing process, found overwhelming support for restrictions on beginning drivers, such as a minimum period of supervised driving, night driving curfews, and restrictions on the number of teenagers in the car (Ferguson and Williams, 1996).

How do parents with teenage children approaching the licensing age feel about more stringent licensing laws in their own state? In view of the newly enacted Connecticut law, parents of 15 year-olds in the state were asked about their attitudes toward the existing law, how they feel about the new law requiring a six-month supervised learning period, and their reactions to the overall concept of graduated licensing. A random statewide sample of 400 parents was interviewed during June 12-16, 1996. About 64 percent of the respondents were mothers, and 36 percent were fathers.

RESULTS

There was strong support for the new law, with 84 percent agreeing it is an improvement compared with the old law (62 percent strongly agreed). Although about half of parents agreed that the new law will likely inconvenience them (58 percent) and make it harder to transport their teens (46 percent), 81 percent thought making teenagers wait until 16 years and 6 months for their driver's licenses is a good idea.

Almost all parents surveyed (91 percent) supported a required minimum period of supervised driving, and 70 percent thought the period should be six months or longer. Parents were told a late night driving provision had been included in the original bill but is not in the final law, and they were asked whether they would support a nighttime driving curfew in Connecticut. Eighty-two percent reported they would like a nighttime driving curfew. Of those who support a curfew, 18 percent would like to see it start at or before 9 p.m., 37 percent favored 10 p.m., 30 percent favored 11 p.m., and 15 percent favored midnight or later.

Some graduated licensing systems do not allow beginning drivers to transport other teenagers in their cars when first licensed without an adult present. Parents were asked whether they support such a restriction, and 58 percent indicated they do. They also were informed about the total package of provisions included in a model graduated licensing system, including a minimum supervised driving requirement for beginning drivers and a restricted license for young drivers that would limit nighttime driving and transportation of other teens during the first 6 to 12 months of licensure. Seventy percent of parents expressed support for this system.

There were some differences between opinions of mothers and fathers. In general, mothers tended to be more supportive of teenage driving restrictions (see also Ferguson and Williams, 1996). Mothers were more likely to support a minimum period of supervised driving (94 percent compared with 87 percent of fathers) and to say the new law in Connecticut is an improvement compared with the existing law (88 percent compared with 81 percent of fathers). Mothers also were more likely to support graduated licensing (74 percent compared with 65

percent of fathers) and to support a restriction on teenage passengers when first licensed (63 percent compared with 51 percent of fathers).

CONCLUSIONS

Parents of 15 year-olds, who will be most directly affected by the six-month mandatory holding period before unrestricted licensure, overwhelmingly support the new law. They recognize it will lengthen the period when they need to transport their teenage children, but most agree that beginning drivers will benefit from an extended period of supervised driving.

Many of the parents surveyed feel the new law does not go far enough and expressed disappointment that a nighttime driving curfew is not included. Such curfews are in place in many states. For example, 16-year-old drivers in New York and Pennsylvania and 17 year-olds who have not completed driver education are restricted from driving between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. (New York) and 12 a.m. and 5 a.m. (Pennsylvania). Research has shown curfews to be among the most effective ways to reduce crashes of 16 year-olds (Preusser et al., 1984; Ferguson et al., 1996). Other states also are recognizing the benefits of nighttime restrictions. Florida has enacted a graduated licensing law that includes an 11 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew for 16 year-olds and a 1 a.m.-5 a.m. curfew for 17 year-olds. A graduated licensing bill including a night driving curfew also is pending in Michigan.

States are increasingly introducing graduated licensing legislation, and more are expected to introduce such legislation during the next few years. In many cases, there is resistance to enacting all the components of a graduated system at one time. But given the growing public support for graduated licensing, legislators in states with only some of the provisions are likely to introduce bills to add other provisions in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The authors wish to thank Bill Leaf, Preusser Research Group, Inc. of Trumbull, Connecticut, for questionnaire development and data analysis.

REFERENCES

- Ferguson, S.A. and Williams, A.F. 1996. Parents' views of driver licensing practices in the United States. *Journal of Safety Research*, 27 (2):73-81.
- Ferguson, S.A.; Leaf, W.; Williams, A.F.; and Preusser, D. 1996. Differences in young driver crash involvement in states with varying licensure practices. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 28:171-80.
- Preusser, D.; Williams, A.F.; Zador, P.; and Blomberg, R. 1984. The effect of curfew laws on motor vehicle crashes. *Law and Policy* 6:115-28.
- Williams, A.F.; Weinberg, K.; Fields, M.; and Ferguson, S.A. 1996. Current requirements for getting a driver's license in the United States. *Journal of Safety Research*, 27 (2):93-101.
- Williams, A.F. 1996. Overview of the young driver problem in the United States. *Transportation Research Circular* No. 458. Washington, D.C.: Transportation Research Board.