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**The Washington Post**

# Md. Gets Tougher On New Drivers

## Most Measures Focus on Teens

*By Charles Babington*  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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The Maryland General Assembly joined a nationwide trend toward tougher requirements for new drivers yesterday, lengthening to four months the period that teenagers must have a learner's permit and creating harsher penalties for drivers who get ticketed in their first 18 months with a license.

The new law, which takes effect in July 1999, will oblige teenagers to pass through a nearly two-year period with limited driving rights before getting an unrestricted license -- once considered a 16-year-old's birthright.

The measure also will require all people seeking their first license to take a driver's education course; previously that rule was not applied to those 18 and older.

Lawmakers were spurred by national studies showing that inexperienced drivers cause a disproportionate number of serious accidents.

Drivers ages 15 to 20 make up about 7 percent of the nation's licensed drivers but 15 percent of all traffic fatalities, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

"The combination of inexperience and immaturity can be deadly," said Stephen Blackstone, a safety board analyst who has testified in Annapolis and other state capitals. He said about 20 states have considered legislation this year involving "graduated licensing," which often involves special curfews or other restrictions for new drivers.

"In terms of highway safety right now," he said, "it's certainly one of the major issues in state legislatures."

Virginia and the District have not gone as far as Maryland. Neither jurisdiction imposes a curfew on young drivers, whereas Maryland teenagers start with "provisional licenses" that prohibit driving between midnight and 5 a.m.

Under the Maryland measure approved yesterday, the curfew will apply for 18 months rather than the current 12 months. That means

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Marylanders will have to be at least 17 1/2 years old before qualifying for an unrestricted license.

The key provisions of the bill, which the Glendening administration has endorsed, include:

Maryland teenagers must have a learner's permit -- which allows them to drive only when they are alongside a licensed adult -- for four months, rather than the current two weeks. They still must be 15 years and 9 months old to obtain a learner's permit, so they must be at least a month past their 16th birthday to obtain a provisional driver's license.

A provisional license will be issued to all first-time drivers, not just those younger than 18, and will last 18 months, not the current 12.

Penalties for moving violations, including failure to wear a seat belt, will now be harsher for all those with provisional licenses: mandatory driver's school for a first offense, 30-day license suspension for a second, license revocation for a third.

The midnight curfew, however, will apply only to those with provisional licenses who are younger than 18.

This year's Virginia General Assembly endorsed similar sanctions for drivers younger than 18. But in Virginia, unlike Maryland, failure to wear a seat belt is not a "primary offense" that justifies a traffic stop and ticket in the absence of other violations.

The Maryland Senate yesterday unanimously approved the new license measure, which the House had passed Wednesday.

A key supporter, Sen. Norman R. Stone Jr. (D-Baltimore County), said during a committee hearing: "The studies show that fatalities are so great among young people and inexperienced drivers. We're hoping we can help that situation."

Many teenagers are less enthralled. "Yecch!" said Caitlin Stone, 16, when told yesterday that teenagers will have to have provisional licenses and be subjected to the midnight curfew for 18 months rather than 12.

"It's a pain," she said as she and her Annapolis High School classmates poured into the student parking lot. "If you're at a party at night and you've got to take a lot of people home, it's hard to finish before midnight."

Justin Phillips, 18, agreed. "I think it's kind of dumb," he said of the new measure. "Old people are worse drivers than young people."

Phillips, who holds a provisional license, acknowledged that he has been ticketed for tailgating and "negligent driving" in his Ford Mustang convertible. Those violations would cost him his license for 30 days under the new law.

### **How Does Graduated Licensing Work?**

The three stages of a graduated licensing system include specific components and restrictions to introduce driving privileges gradually to beginning drivers. Novice drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior in each stage of licensing before advancing to the next stage.

Each stage has recommended components and restrictions for States to consider when implementing a graduated licensing system. Example components and restrictions of each stage include:

#### **Stage 1: Learner's Permit**

- State's minimum age for a learner's permit.
- Pass vision and knowledge tests, including rules of the road, signs, and signals.
- Complete basic vehicle skills training.
- Licensed adult (at least age 21) required in the vehicle at all times.
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Permit is distinctive from other driver licenses.
- Must remain crash-and conviction-free for at least six months to move to the next stage.
- Supervised practice.

#### **Stage 2: Intermediate (Provisional)**

- Complete Stage 1.
- State's minimum age.
- Pass a behind-the-wheel road test.
- Complete advanced driver education training (e.g. safe driving decision-making, risk education, etc.)
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Licensed adult required in the vehicle during late night hours (e.g., nighttime driving restriction).
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Driver improvement actions are initiated at lower point level than for regular drivers.
- Provisional license is distinctive from a regular license.
- Must remain crash-and conviction-free for at least 12 consecutive months to move to the next stage.
- Supervised practice.

#### **Stage 3: Full Licensure**

- Complete Stage 2.
- State's minimum age.
- Zero alcohol while driving.

### **How Many States Have A Graduated License System?**

Although licensing practices vary from state-to-state, several states have various recommended components of a graduated driver licensing system. For example, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin all have components of a graduated licensing system.

Ontario and Nova Scotia, Canada; Victoria, Australia, and New Zealand also have graduated driver licensing systems.

### **How Effective Is Graduated Licensing?**

Evaluations clearly show the benefits of a graduated licensing system. California reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes for drivers ages 15-17. Maryland reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes and a 10 percent reduction in traffic convictions for drivers age 16-17. Oregon reported a 16 percent reduction in crashes for male drivers age 16-17.

An evaluation in New Zealand reported an 8 percent reduction in crashes for drivers ages 15-19.

### **Who Supports Graduated Licensing?**

The following organizations have publicly supported a graduated driver licensing system:

- Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
- Allstate Insurance
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators
- AAA
- American Automobile Manufacturers Association
- American Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS)
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- Brain Injury Association
- Center for Disease Control
- General Federation of Woman's Clubs
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- International Association of Chiefs of Police
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving
- National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives
- National Association of Independent Insurers
- National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health

- National Commission Against Drunk Driving
- National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- National Safety Council
- National Sheriffs' Association
- National Transportation Safety Board
- Police Executive Research Forum
- The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) and its member companies
- The Century Council, supported by concerned members of the beverage alcohol industry
- The Beer Institute and its members
- USAA Insurance

#### **What Products and Services Are Available?**

- Consultation on provisions and implementation of graduated licensing systems: from AAMVA and NHTSA.
- Testimony before state legislatures: from AAMVA and NHTSA.
- "Graduated Driver Licensing System for Young Novice Drivers," Guidelines for Motor Vehicle Administrators, NHTSA and AAMVA, DOT HS 808 331, January 1996. Note: Being updated. No copies available.
- "Graduated Licensing System: Learning the Skill, Earning the Privilege," 2 Volume Resource Package, from AAA Government Relations.
- Video and media kit describing graduated licensing: from NAI.
- Video, "Young Drivers: The High-Risk Years," from IIHS.
- A sample graduated driver licensing system law.
- Report to Congress, "Research Agenda for an Improved Novice Driver Education Program," (May 1994): from NHTSA.

- Evaluation studies from California, Maryland, Oregon, and New Zealand showing the benefits of graduated licensing: from NHTSA.
- National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Report to States, "Reducing Youth Highway Crashes," (March 1993).
- Brochure: "Questions Most Frequently Asked About Graduated Driver Licensing" from NHTSA and ACTS.
- Brochure: "License to Live," from NHTSA and ACTS.

#### **Information Sources**

American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)

4301 Wilson Blvd., Suite 400,  
Arlington, VA 22203

Mike Calvin, Director of Driver Services  
703-522-4200 (Fax: 703-522-1553)

National Association of Independent Insurers (NAII)

2600 River Road,  
Des Plaines, IL 60018-3286

Joe Annotti, Asst. Vice-President  
847-297-7800 (Fax: 847-297-5064)

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS)

1005 North Glebe Road,  
Arlington, VA 22201

Allan F. Williams, Ph.D.  
703-247-1500 (Fax: 703-247-1678)

American Coalition for Traffic Safety

1110 North Glebe Road, Suite 1020  
Arlington, VA 22201

Elizabeth Russell, Director of Admin.  
703-243-7501 (Fax: 703-243-2806)

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**All reports and additional information are available through your State Office of Highway Safety, the NHTSA Regional Office serving your state, or from NHTSA Headquarters, Traffic Safety Programs, NTS-32, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590, 202-366-4800.**