



**Testimony
of
Ronald W. Kosh
House Transportation Committee
Philadelphia, PA
July 24, 2007**

House Bill 163 and House Bill 1141 (Teen Driving/Passenger Restrictions)

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee members. I am Ron Kosh, Vice-President of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Mid-Atlantic. AAA has almost three-million members in Pennsylvania and more than 660,000 members in the Philadelphia 5-county region, which I represent.

As an organization, we work to preserve our freedom of mobility and improve travel safety. Teen driving remains one of AAA's top priorities. We have undertaken numerous studies and we have polled our members on teen driving issues.

Study after study shows that our teen drivers are our most dangerous drivers. Car crashes remain the leading cause of death among 16-to-19-year olds. The age group's per-mile fatality rate is four-times that of adults.

The reasons are clear: young drivers are inexperienced, immature, and overconfident. They are prone to peer pressure, inclined to take risks, increasingly distracted and tempted to multi-task behind the wheel.

Sadly, just last month, five teens on a summer trip to a New York lake died in a head-on crash with a truck. Police said the cell phone of the 17-year-old driver had received and sent text messages in the seconds before the crash. While we will *never know* if the driver was the one doing the text-messaging, we *do know* that a succession of calls and text messages on her phone could have contributed to the deadly crash.

This month, AAA in conjunction with *Seventeen Magazine* released the results of a study on teen driving behaviors. An alarmingly high number of teen drivers engage in high-risk behavior while driving. More than half of the teens surveyed admitted to risky behavior behind the wheel, including:

- 51 % who said they talk on a cell phone
- 43 % who said they read text messages
- 32 % who said they send text messages

We already know that car crashes kill more teens than suicides, drugs or guns combined. Now, teen drivers are telling us that they are increasingly distracted by electronic devices.

Placing restrictions on driving privileges is neither a punishment nor an indictment of today's teens. The fact is: driving conditions have changed.

Nationally, there are some 5,000 teen driving crash fatalities every year. Here in Pennsylvania, there are 100 fatalities for crashes involving just 16 and 17 year olds every year.

A study released earlier this year by our AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in conjunction with researchers at Johns Hopkins found that 16-year-old drivers are involved in 38-percent fewer fatal crashes and 40-percent fewer injury crashes if their state has a graduated driver licensing program with at least five of seven common components. Pennsylvania only has five of the seven basic GDL components. (*AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, "Nationwide Review of Graduated Drivers Licenses," February 2007*)

We still lack two critical elements:

- a nighttime driving restriction that begins at 10 p.m. (not 11 p.m.) and
- a passenger restriction that allows no more than one passenger (except family members).

In Pennsylvania, teen drivers can have as many passengers as there are seatbelts in the vehicle - - the law does nothing to prevent teen drivers from loading a car with distracting passengers. A car full of teen passengers driven by a teen is a virtual crash waiting to happen. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia now have passenger restrictions for teen drivers.

Studies show the chances that a teen will die in a crash increase exponentially with each additional passenger. Researchers at Johns Hopkins found that the chances a 16-year-old will die in a crash increase 39% with a single passenger, 86% with two passengers, and 182% with three or more passengers. (*Journal of American Medical Association, March 22, 2000*)

Another study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (*Role of Driver Distraction in Traffic Crashes, 2001*) found that young drivers, under age 20, are the

most likely to be involved in distraction-related crashes. Statistically, teens are the most easily distracted drivers and distractions increase the risk of a crash.

AAA has found that nighttime and passenger restrictions do lower death and injury crash rates for young drivers. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety Study, "Reducing the Crash Risk for Young Drivers," June 2006)

AAA believes that tough but fair laws that focus specifically on our young drivers can save both their lives and the lives of others on the road. If we look to the results of a study AAA did last year, we find that the majority of those killed in teen driver crashes are people other than the teen drivers themselves. Teen drivers put everyone else on the road at risk. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety Study, "Teen Crashes – Everyone is at Risk," January 2006)

Changing our laws to respond to these statistics seems to make sense to motorists.

AAA polled Pennsylvanians across the Commonwealth to ask them how they feel about limiting the number of passengers in a new teen driver's car. Unequivocally, they said yes - 93% of those polled favor teen passenger legislation. (2006 AAA Public Affairs Survey – AAA Pennsylvania Federation) In another AAA poll done only in the Philadelphia five-county area, 80% of respondents favored teen passenger restrictions. (2007-2008 AAA Mid-Atlantic Public Opinion Poll on Key Transportation Issues)

We also polled on the teen cell phone issue.

97% of Pennsylvanians also said yes – ban teen drivers from using cell phones. (2006 AAA Public Affairs Survey – AAA Pennsylvania Federation) In a separate AAA poll in the Philadelphia five-county area, 89% said yes. (2007-2008 AAA Mid-Atlantic Public Opinion Poll on Key Transportation Issues)

The more experience we can give teens behind the wheel, the more we can get teens to buckle up, the more we can help young drivers manage their distractions, and the better role models we can be as adult drivers, the safer our teen drivers will be on the road.

AAA urges you to strengthen Pennsylvania's teen driving laws. Getting a driver's license today is still a rite of passage it once was. Conditions of the road have changed. We live in a faster-paced world with faster cars, more vehicles, and more aggressive and distracted driving.

We have a responsibility to protect our young people from crashes, injuries and deaths. AAA believes that one of the ways we can do that is by changing the rules of the road for young drivers.

