



Graduated Driver's Licensing (GDL)

Background

Statistics from the Hawaii Department of Transportation show that in 2002 there were 1,124 crashes involving teens 15-18 years of age. There were 10 fatalities and 1,085 were injured. Excessive speed, failure to yield, following too close, inattention and misjudgment were found to be major factors related to these crashes. Statistics in this range have been repeated for the years going back to 1986. Alcohol was involved in 40% of fatal crashes. Among 15-19 year olds, 40% of the deaths due to injury in Hawaii were due to motor vehicle crashes (1991-2000).

Nationwide, 16 year-olds have almost 10 times the crash risk of drivers ages 30-59 and almost 3 times the risk of older teenagers. The first year of licensed driving is the most hazardous in a young driver's driving lifetime, and it is the most hazardous for their peer passengers.

Graduated Drivers Licensing (GDL)

Thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia have responded to the needs of their young drivers by instituting a Graduated Drivers Licensing system. The system has three phases: 1) a supervised learner's period, 2) an intermediate (provisional) phase that permits unsupervised driving but only in less risky situations and includes limits on nighttime driving and peer passengers, 3) a full-privilege license after conditions of the first two phases have been met.

A provisional phase would need to be added to Hawaii's statutes. This phase would include nighttime driving restrictions requiring an adult aged 21 or older to be in the vehicle with the young driver between certain hours, a requirement for all passengers to wear seat belts, possible restrictions on type and number of passengers, and a suspension of the license for failing to meet the requirements or for being involved in a driving-related offense.

In February 2003, the National Safety Council reported that twelve different studies found that GDL systems reduced teen crash rates by as much as 33%. In one study the fatalities were reduced by 58%.

Role of the Pediatrician

Pediatricians are involved in accident prevention from the newborn period through the teen and young adult years. Children are most vulnerable to injury by accidents in the earliest years when they are physically immature and in their teen years when risk taking becomes important to them at the same time their reasoning abilities are maturing into adulthood. Maturing processes take time. At all ages there is a need to set protective limits so that this process can develop without bodily injury coming into play. The Graduated Driver's Licensing system has been shown as an effective way of providing protective limits thus reducing teen fatalities and injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes.

References:

Website: AAP Journal of Pediatrics, Policy Statement (1998)
<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;98/5/987.pdf>

Brief explaining the need for GDL prepared for Good Beginnings by Carol
McNamee.

Website: Department of Transportation, Public Affairs Statistics for Hawaii
www.state.hi.us/dot/publicaffairs/drivered

Website: National Safety Council, Fact Sheet
www.nsc.org/library/facts/youngdrive.htm

Website: National Safety Council
How State Laws Prevent Young-Driver Tragedies
www.nsc.org/library/shelf/gdl.htm

Additional Information:

The Bill to establish GDL in Hawaii has been introduced by Sen. Cal Yawamoto, Chair of the Transportation Committee. It is SB 1588. It has also been referred to the Judiciary Committee, Colleen Hanabusa, Chair. The Bill can be tracked on the Legislature web site, www.capital.hawaii.gov. There is additional information relative to Legislative operations on this web site including membership of the various committees and how to contact them.

Supporters of the Bill include the Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition/SAFE KIDS Hawaii, Madd, AAA, Waianae Comprehensive Health Center and Champions for Children.

Objections to the Bill have been the restrictions on night driving. These have been addressed in the new Bill by allowances for teens going to school-related events.