

Testimony for Transportation Committee

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I thank the members of the Transportation Committee for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Connecticut Driving School Professionals in opposition to bill SB 488. This association is made up of driving schools pursuing improved safety through better training of teen and adult drivers.

This bill has two parts. One would enable organizations with no experience in driver education to teach the eight-hour course on laws, drugs and alcohol simply by employing a licensed instructor. The other would require all driving schools to offer the eight-hour training session online.

Let me address this point first. Online training seems to work best when the person taking the training is highly committed to learning. As Peter Cappelli, who writes the Talent Management Column for *Human Resource Executive Online* noted several years ago, "Online training seems to be more effective for older, motivated students, while the classroom works best for younger low-achievers."

As one who has personally trained several thousand new drivers, I can assure you that many of my students did not initially recognize the risk or complexity of driving on public highways. In short, these people would not be the motivated students Cappelli references.

Online training also adds an additional complication. How can I be sure that the student who has successfully completed the online training program is the same person I am about to certify? I can't. Some students of all ages will cheat. They buy term papers and arrange for others to take exams. Do we really want to make it easy to skip vital driver training?

Online training will also weaken the effectiveness of the teen-parent class, which in research just conducted by the Connecticut Children's Injury Prevention Center, has been shown to be overwhelmingly valuable. Do we also want to jeopardize that success?

As for allowing just about any organization to offer the eight-hour training to teens and adults, this, too, is rife with risk. Often, this is the only professional instruction these future drivers will receive. While the DMV has provided an outline, its successful implementation requires an instructor with special skills. Not all licensed instructors are capable of fulfilling this responsibility.

The statement of purpose for this bill alludes to convenience. Nowhere in the measure is the issue of safety mentioned. Compared to many industrialized countries, the United States already requires a lower level of knowledge and vehicle control capabilities to be demonstrated before granting a license. Perhaps for that reason our traffic death rate per 1-billion vehicle kilometers traveled is higher, based on research by the World Health Organization, than that of Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Iceland, Ireland, France, Sweden, Norway, and the list goes on. In some cases, our death rate is twice as high. This is not the time to decrease the effectiveness of proven safety programs in pursuit of convenience. The stakes are too high. Please reject bill 488.

I welcome any questions.