Online Driver Education Testimony Proposed Bill 488

Online Driver Education Concerns from a Connecticut Driver Educator

There are some essential questions and thoughts stake holders in Connecticut Driver Education should be considering in regards to online driver education:

Are we just providing information that can be fed back to us through quizzes about laws and rules (information regurgitation), or are we in the business of teaching students how to prevent crashes and injuries? Preparing students to drive through hands on activities and learning is essential. Students need to learn how to perform skills in the classroom, then generalize these skills through practical training behind the wheel. Role modeling and preparing students how to handle situations and critical moment decisions and choices is what we do as educators. These decisions range from deciding how to handle the vehicle in an emergency situation to making choices about alcohol and distractions.

I believe it would be important for the State of Connecticut to evaluate the effectiveness of online programs vs the effectiveness of traditional programs before jumping on the technology bandwagon. There are plenty of journal articles and research already done for other programs and AAA has done a comparison. Once the statistics show an online program can be just as effective if not better than traditional classroom programming in preventing crashes, I would fully support it. Right now, the only thing I see is the promise of money being saved and convenience to the consumer rather than an increase in safety and crash reduction. I would support a bill that launched a study to show the effectiveness of online driver education vs traditional driver education and included recommendations based on statistics and facts, but not the current proposed bill which clearly changes the face of driver education in Connecticut without any evidence of effectiveness and crash reduction. In 2012, New Hampshire had a similar type of proposal as what I am suggesting. It started out as HB 1440 and was voted down in favor of an interim study to provide evidence and effectiveness of online driver education. Show me the numbers!

If an online program is deemed to be as effective or better than traditional driver education I think it's also important to look into how online program could be beneficial to students who only opt to take the eight hour safe driving class. The reason that option even exists was due to the financial burden of a full 30 hours of classroom and 8 hours of instruction behind the wheel. Currently parents who opt their children in the eight hour only program through a driving school are required to complete 22 hours of classroom training at home with their student. In over the past six years since the implementation of graduated driver licensing, not one parent who came through my parent class was aware or had even spent the 22 hours of classroom time with their child until I mentioned it. Although I would rather see students in a traditional classroom with a licensed certified instructor, if driver education was online, it would be reasonable to say that 30 hours of mandatory classroom instruction for all teenagers via online driver education would be reasonable and financially cost effective.

One question which will be difficult to evaluate is "Does online driver education stand the test of time?". I often think back to my driver education experience as a teenager from twenty two

years ago. I clearly remember my instructor how he was an excellent educator. I'm sure I don't remember everything he taught, but he was important so that made the things he was saying important. He cared about me as a person and my future as a driver. Over the past few days I've asked several people about their classroom driving instructor. I've heard lots of stories from people who have had their license for five years and people who have had their license for over 40 years. Most of them clearly remember their instructor and how important an actual instructor was in the classroom. None of them believed they would have remembered some class they took on the computer years later. Would an online driver education program care about me?

I feel I am biased towards this issue one because I am a driver educator in Connecticut and two because I operate a driving school in Connecticut. Being a good driver or getting a license is not just about passing the driver's test. It's about becoming a safe driver and avoiding crashes. I as a person care that the students in my program become good with road skills and at the same time become safety conscious drivers who when faced with tough decisions can make the right one. They know I care.

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