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State of Connecticut General Assembly
Transportation Committee
Public Hearing on Outstanding Bills

February 9, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Brandon Dufour. I am the General Manager at All-Star Driver. All-Star Driver is a Connecticut based driving school that operates in over 70 locations around the state. We pride ourselves on the quality of education that we provide. Each year, we graduate more than 10,000 new drivers onto Connecticut's roads. To date, we boast a first time test passing rate of more than 96%. Enclosed in this package is testimony on 5 proposed bills that have the potential to drastically effect the safe operation of Motor Vehicles on the roads. Thank you for considering these thoughts as you review these proposed bills.

Proposed S.B. No. 488 - AN ACT CONCERNING AVAILABILITY OF THE DRUG AND ALCOHOL EDUCATION CLASS REQUIRED FOR AN OPERATOR'S LICENSE.

The Driving School Industry has strict requirements. The nature of driving is one in which anyone may consider themselves to be a "professional." Though experience behind the wheel is helpful in safe driving, experience does not equate to expertise. The licensed driving schools assure that our instruction staffs are adhering to curriculum and are trained on the most current safe driving topics. Allowing this course to be taught for free or reduced costs in public buildings by instructors not tied to a school is a major risk to public safety. It would require a complete overhaul of the driving school regulations, as these regulations all apply to licensed schools, not licensed instructors. CS-1 Completion Certificates are issued to licensed schools, not licensed instructors. Bond requirements and insurance policies are issued to schools, not instructors. Finally, insurance and liability considerations need to be made.

Consider a driving instructor, not tied to a school, hosts a free 8-hour course in a library. Within the course, the instructor states that it is ok to have a drink or two and then drive. Who is monitoring the class to correct that statement? Who will the parents or students complain to regarding this statement? And finally, if a student follows this advice, has a drink or two and drives, and is in an accident, what insurance will protect the instructor from his negligence? These are things that people have said within the course of employment at our driving school, and we have heard stories of it from other schools. The advantage of these being run through a driving school is the level of accountability we are able to hold our employees to. Their future employment depends on their ability to teach a high quality course offering. An independent educator in driver education removes this accountability. One bad driving instructor would be able to move from

public library to public library, teaching poor courses at a reduced rate. The students will get nothing out of it, and the safety of the roads will drastically and negatively affected.

Within this bill, there is also a call for online driver education. This is a slippery slope. If done correctly, online education can benefit the state and be good for traffic safety. However, if not carefully thought out and rolled out slowly, this can be detrimental to safe driving. Online classroom training must coincide with behind the wheel training requirements. The vendors that are approved to provide this training must also be carefully considered. Online delivery is a reality in education, and one that the State would be remiss in ignoring. However, it cannot be rushed. A committee to research this as an option would be recommended.

Proposed H.B. No. 5227 - AN ACT REPEALING THE STATUTE ALLOWING MOTOR VEHICLE OPERATORS' LICENSES FOR DRIVING PURPOSES ONLY.

At All-Star Driver, we were hesitant to service the Drive Only market. However, after some convincing from community leaders, we are holding classes in Spanish and educating 100-200 students per week. Politics aside, this bill will do wonders for safety on our roadways. The volume of people driving without a license is scary. Consider that many are also driving unregistered and uninsured or underinsured vehicles, it gets scarier. The Drive Only Licensing program should continue, but consideration needs to be given on ways that it could be done better, and safer. I would recommend a literacy test to assure reading levels are high enough to see and understand road signs and emergency warnings. I would also recommend an English proficiency test as part of the knowledge test process. This will assure that anyone applying for their license cannot sneak through the testing process, appearing to know how to drive, when they actually cannot.

Consideration should also be given to the handling of this population. Incorporating the undocumented population into the normal scope and operations of DMV is negatively affecting the customer experience of the citizens of Connecticut. We originally started our programs in Spanish in October, and quickly learned that it isn't as easy as just saying "Hablamos espanol." We were forced to separate our operations, with clear distinctions between Spanish offerings and English offerings. We have a separate Spanish call center. We have separate Spanish teaching materials. We have a separate Spanish website. In our one month experience, the undocumented population is tying up the DMV lines. The requirements for this population are not consistent between DMV branches. Though there has been outreach to community leaders regarding the requirements, this population is still confused as to what is or is not required. When they arrive at the DMV branch unprepared, it effects everyone in the DMV. To date, there has been no outreach to driving schools from the DMV or anyone in government regarding our expectation in this process. We can alleviate a lot of this stress, and can be a resource to the DMV in working out the kinks in this program. Keep in mind, for the next 2 months, this population is only testing for permits. Beginning in April, you have both permit and license tests happening simultaneously.

We realized by not committing to the offering 100%, we were killing the business of teenage new driver students. The Drive Only program should not be repealed, but a committee should be formed to guide and support the DMV in properly servicing both the Drive Only and traditional New Driver applicants.

Proposed H.B. No. 6321 & 6348 - ACTS CONCERNING PARENT ATTENDANCE AT SAFE DRIVING INSTRUCTIONS.

This bill goes against everything that the teen safe driving committee found in 2008. The reason that parents must attend with their children is to foster a relationship of communication and safe driver training. Even if the content in the course were to remain the same (more on this later), the goal of the course is to get parents talking to their new driver about the expectations and rules of the house. If a parent has this talk with child number 1, they must also have it with child #2. By saying to parents that it is ok to miss this, Child #2 is immediately at a disadvantage in their driver training. The time commitment is only 2 hours. The courses are offered frequently, and at times convenient for every type of parent.

Additionally, technology is moving fast. Automobiles have new features every year, some positive for safety, some not. The education course that a parent receives for their teen today will not be the same course they receive 1 or 2 or 3 years from now. We are not asking a lot out of parents by asking them to attend this class. It is 2 hours, and could be the difference between their new teen drivers being accident free and not. We strongly oppose these 2 bills, and recommend that they go no further.

Proposed H.B. No. 6332 - AN ACT CONCERNING YOUNG DRIVERS

Driving for emergency response purposes does not magically turn a teen into a skilled or more experienced driver. Allowing passengers simply because a teen is working on emergency responses could be irresponsible. However, if there is a need for these teens to be participating in emergency responses, perhaps a course could be designed that tests a new teen drivers' skill level. Passing the course and associated test would allow for them to be exempt from the passenger requirements while driving for emergency responses. However, just allowing it because they are emergency workers, without any additional training, would not be recommended.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is a clear move in these bills to make driver's ed cheaper and easier to access. While I understand this push, I ask you to think carefully before moving forward. Connecticut has become a national leader in safe driving through the Graduated Licensing Program. Anything proposed here could lead to large backwards steps. It is not possible to have cheap, easy driver education and have safe roads. Thank you for your time and consideration.

