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**DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE**  
**REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON YOUNG DRIVERS**  
**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

JANUARY, 1998

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# **REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON YOUNG DRIVERS**

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# **REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON YOUNG DRIVERS**

## **Background**

The 15 member Task Force on Young Drivers was created by the Secretary of State in August, 1997, in response to Legislative and departmental concerns regarding the disproportionately high number of accidents and fatalities among young drivers from 16 to 24 years of age. Young drivers in this age category hold 12.5 percent of all operator's licenses but are involved in 30 percent of all motor vehicle crashes and suffer 25 percent of all motor vehicle fatalities. Motor vehicle accidents are the largest single cause of death among young drivers, exceeding cancer, suicide, and other causes of deaths. As a result of the expected 25 percent increase in the 16 to 24 year old age category in the year 2012, if nothing is done, the number of fatalities and accidents among these drivers will increase geometrically.

The Task Force held several meetings, including three public hearings in Portland, Bangor, and Presque Isle. The public hearings were conducted in the evenings of September 30, 1997, at Bangor High School; October 7, 1997, at the Portland Public Library; and on October 21, 1997, at the Northern Maine Technical College in Presque Isle. Prior to each hearing, personal invitations were sent to class officers and the principals of area high schools, as well as law enforcement officers and district attorneys in each region. These invitations included a notice of the hearing, a description of the problem, and a request to each invitee to offer recommendations to address the problems associated with young drivers.

The Task Force on Young Drivers also heard special presentations made by the Office of Substance Abuse within the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse; the Maine Driver Education Association; the Maine Substance Abuse Association; and the Anheuser-Busch Corporation.

The Secretary of State met with driver license examiners to discuss the relevance and effectiveness of the current driving tests.

To obtain as much student and teacher input as possible, the Secretary of State has personally visited and made presentations to more than a dozen high schools in regard to the work of the Task Force. The students have been invited to offer recommendations and to comment on proposed recommendations regarding young drivers.

The Task Force conducted extensive research and analysis with respect to the extent of the problems involving young drivers across the nation, the causes of fatalities and injuries among young drivers, and the actions of other states to address these problems. From the evidence gathered, the Task Force has proposed a comprehensive approach to address the problems of young drivers. This approach includes legislation to strengthen current laws, changes in departmental rules to strengthen the driver education program in the State, and changes in the driving examination or road test to make it more relevant, challenging and meaningful.

# TASK FORCE ON YOUNG DRIVERS

## FINDINGS

### Extent of the Problem

1. **Motor Vehicle deaths are the leading cause of deaths of teenagers and young drivers. Motor vehicle deaths significantly outdistance deaths from homicides, suicide, other accidental deaths, drugs, AIDS, cancer or heart disease for the 15 to 24 year old age group.**

*In Maine, on the average, nearly one person between the ages of 15 and 24 is killed each week in a motor vehicle accident.* In 1996, there were 45 motor vehicle fatalities in this age group, of which 23 or **50 percent were teenagers.**

**Across the nation, 270 persons in this same age group are killed each week for a total of 14,000 deaths per year. Of this number, 6,000 or 42 percent are teenagers.** The remaining 58 percent are 20 to 24 years old.

2. **No other age group in the nation or in Maine experiences the rate of motor vehicle deaths or injuries as the 15 to 24 year old age group. Maine ranks first in New England with respect to the motor vehicle fatality rate among 15 to 24 year olds.**

<u>AGE GROUP</u>	<u>% OF LICENSED MAINE DRIVERS</u>	<u>% OF MAINE FATALITIES</u>
♦ Under 15 years	NA	5.5%
♦ <b>15 to 24 years</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>
♦ 25 to 34 years	18.8%	15.5%
♦ 35 to 44 years	23.0%	11.2%
♦ 45 to 54 years	18.8%	8.5%
♦ 55 to 64 years	11.5%	5.9%
♦ 65 to 74 years	9.5%	13.4%
♦ 75 years+	5.9%	15.0%

**In Maine, the 15 to 24 year old age group leads all age groups in all types of motor vehicle accidents.**

♦ Fatal crashes	25.0%
♦ Injury crashes	27.9%
♦ Property-damage-only crashes	28.1%

- 3. The 15 to 24 year old category also experiences a disproportionately high injury rate from motor vehicle crashes, many of whom are paralyzed or severely disabled for the rest of their lives.**

**On the average, nearly 60 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years are injured each week in Maine, for a total of 3,000 injured in this class. This group experiences 28% of total injuries suffered by all age groups.**

**Nationally, on the average, nearly 11,500 teenagers are injured each week for a total of 595,000 in 1996.**

- 4. Over the next 15 years-until the year 2012, the teenage population is expected to grow 25 percent, nationwide, and fatalities and injuries among young drivers are expected to increase at the same rate.**

**In Maine, a 25% increase in the young driver population could mean an increase from 45 to 56 deaths per year and an increase from 3,000 to 3,750 injured each year.**

**Nationally, teenage deaths in motor vehicle crashes are projected to increase to 145 per week, a 25 % increase for a total of 7,500 per year. Teenagers injured in motor vehicle crashes are expected to increase to nearly 14,425 per week for a total of 750,000 per year.**

If nothing is done to address the disproportionately high number of motor vehicle accidents and deaths among young drivers, the problem will soon become so intolerable that it may require very unpopular solutions.

## Operating-under-the Influence

- 1. Operating-under-the influence is a very serious problem among young drivers in Maine. The 15 to 24 year old age group ranked second to the 25 to 34 year old age group in 1995 with respect to OUI. There is some evidence that the most severe OUI problem in both Maine and the nation lies with the 21 to 34 year old age category.**

AGE GROUP	% OF TOTAL OUI ARRESTS
♦ 15 to 24 years old	28.9%
♦ 25 to 34 years old	32.9%
♦ 35 to 44 years old	24.0%
♦ All other age groups	less than 10.0% each group

2. **Over the past 10 years, Maine has adopted several significant and tough anti-drinking and driving laws that have significantly reduced fatalities and OUI arrests, particularly among young drivers. Between 1986 and 1996, the number of motor vehicle fatalities dropped 11.1 percent in Maine.**

In Maine, the decrease in motor vehicle fatalities over the past 10 years has been due, in part, to:

- ♦ the increase in the drinking age to age 21 in 1985,
- ♦ lowering the official level of intoxication in 1988 from 0.10 to 0.08,
- ♦ the adoption of stricter seat belt laws in 1989, 1991, and 1995;
- ♦ “Zero” alcohol tolerance for persons under 21 years of age, enacted in 1996;
- ♦ Increased OUI penalties for repeat offenses calculated over a 10 year period instead of a 6 year period. Enacted in 1996.

3. **In 1995, Maine led the nation with respect to the percentage of fatalities in which *no* alcohol was involved.**

In 1995, 72.3% of fatal accidents in Maine involved *no* alcohol consumption, compared to the national average of 58.7 percent.

4. **In Maine, the significant reduction in the rate of OUI arrests among the two lowest age groups has been offset, in part, by increases in OUI arrests among middle age and older drivers.**

AGE CATEGORY	CHANGE IN OUI ARREST RATE, 1986 TO 1995
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♦ 15 to 24 years of age	-28.1%
♦ 25 to 34 years of age	-10.2%
♦ 35 to 44 years of age	+49.7%
♦ 45 to 54 years of age	+54.7%
♦ 55 to 64 years of age	-11.4%
♦ 65 to 74 years of age	+36.6%
♦ 75 years+	+32.5%

## Profile of the Offenders

- 1. Teenage fatalities and injuries from motor vehicle accidents are caused, for the most part, by teenage drivers.**

Teenagers are three to four times more likely to be involved in a crash than the driving population at large.

65 percent of all teenage passengers killed in motor vehicle crashes were occupants of a vehicle operated by a teenage driver.

- 2. Risky driving behavior and motor vehicle fatalities are much more of a male problem than a female problem.**

Of the total number of drivers in crashes in Maine in 1995, 71.5% were male and 28.5% were female.

Of the total number of persons, ages 15 to 24 years, who were killed in 1996, 66.7% were male, and 33.3%, were female.

Of the total number of OUI arrests in 1994, 83.8% were males and 16.2% were females.

## Economic Impact

- 1. The economic cost of motor vehicle accidents and fatalities, per year, is staggering. These accidents and fatalities have a substantial impact on both the Maine and national economies. But more importantly, the loss of human life and human potential has a devastating impact on all of society.**

**In Maine, in 1994, the cost of motor vehicle accidents was \$1.2 billion, nearly reaching the amount of the General Fund Budget for the entire State in that year.**

- ◆ Between 1987 and 1994, 30 percent of the \$10.4 billion cost of motor vehicle accidents was attributable to young drivers between the ages of 15 and 24 years. **This economic cost was equivalent to \$8,380 per person in Maine.**

**Nationally, in 1994, the cost of motor vehicle accidents was \$120 billion or approximately \$500 per person.**

- ◆ \$52.1 billion in property damages were incurred;
- ◆ \$42.4 billion in lost productivity were incurred; and
- ◆ More than \$17 billion was spent on medical expenses.



## **THE TYPICAL CRASH**

**1. Most vehicle accidents involving young people, ages 15 to 20 years, occur on weekends and at night.**

- ♦ 55% of all teenage motor vehicle deaths occur between Friday night and Sunday night, and
- ♦ 43% occur between 9:00 PM and 6:00 AM.

**2. Most teenage vehicle accidents are single vehicle crashes in which there are teenage passengers.**

**3. A disproportionate share of accidents occur on rural roads, particularly in Maine.**

- ♦ In Maine, 83% of all fatal accidents occur on rural roads which comprise 71% of total highway mileage.
- ♦ In the United States, 57% of all fatal accidents occur on rural roads.

**4. Of all teenage (15 to 20 years old) accidents, most (76%) are the result of driver behavior and driver error.**

- ♦ 40% of male drivers 15 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes were speeding;
- ♦ Failure to keep in the proper lane, running off the road, and failure to use seat belts are the most common characteristics of teenage crashes;
- ♦ 82 % who were drinking and killed in accidents were not wearing seat belts or restraints.

**5. Alcohol use, as a cause of fatal motor vehicle accidents, is primarily a male problem.**

- ♦ Of the total number of young drivers involved in fatal crashes in 1995, 24% of male drivers and 10% of female drivers had been drinking.

## **CONCLUSION**

**Motor vehicle deaths are the leading cause of deaths of teenagers and young drivers, significantly outdistancing deaths from homicides, suicide, other accidental deaths, drugs, AIDS, cancer or heart disease for the 15 to 24 year old age category. Not only does this loss of young people deprive Maine and its citizens of the contributions that this vibrant, creative, and adventurous group of future leaders has to offer, it is so needless.**

**Motor vehicle accidents and deaths among young drivers are primarily the result of driver inexperience and immaturity. While driver education and driving skills are very important, they alone will not solve the problem. Increased parental involvement, severe penalties, and stricter laws, by themselves, will not solve the problem.**

**Punitive measures without efforts to channel the energy and thoughts of this group in a more positive direction will only lead to greater avoidance of the law. To reduce motor vehicle accidents and fatalities among young drivers, a comprehensive approach is needed that provides for substantially more driving experience, parental involvement, good decision-making skills, and more mature driving behavior.**

**The impact of drinking and driving is clear, and accident and fatality statistics show how devastating this behavior is on young drivers and other age groups. The most effective courses of action to significantly reduce drinking and driving, however, are *not* clear. Recent changes in the law and current programs to address this problem have made some strides. However, additional study, including a study of all drivers, must be made to propose effective legislation to address this problem.**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## LEGISLATION

### Motor Vehicle Permits and Driver Training

- 1. Raise the age of permittees required to take driver education to 17 years old in order to qualify for an operator's license.**

A. Approximately 12,500 students and 160 driver education schools will be affected by this change in policy.

Driver inexperience is a major factor in motor vehicle accidents and fatalities involving young drivers, especially 16 and 17 year old drivers. Currently, a 17 year old driver can obtain a license in 90 days without completing a driver education course which is required of 16 year olds. By strengthening the driver education program and requiring 17 year olds to complete a formal driver training program, serious accidents and fatalities among this age group may be reduced.

- 2. Raise the age of the licensed driver supervising the permittee from 18 to 20 years of age, and require the supervising driver to have two continuous years of driving experience with a valid driver's license.**

Current law allows a peer of a permittee to supervise the permittee during practice driving. Motor vehicle statistics show that the peers of a young driver are often a distraction or a bad influence on an inexperienced and immature driver. By raising the age of the supervising driver and requiring the supervising driver to have an unblemished record for two years, the permittee will be coached by a more mature and experienced person. The result should be new drivers with better driving skills and habits.

**3. Require a permittee to operate a vehicle for a minimum of 35 hours, above any previous driving experience obtained through driver education, in order to qualify for a provisional license. Of the 35 hours of driving time, 5 hours must be night time driving.**

A. This proposal requires a parent or guardian to certify the permittee's additional hours of driving. A supervising driver may confirm the hours of driving experience that he or she supervised.

Task Force hearings as well as research show that driver inexperience is a major factor in the accidents and fatalities involving young drivers. By increasing the amount of driving time for a permittee to qualify for a license, the new driver should be better prepared for driving and less prone to accidents.

B. This requirement will also involve much greater parental participation in driver training. National statistics indicate that the greater the level of parental involvement, the less number of accidents and deaths their children suffer.

### **Provisional License for New Drivers**

**4. With respect to the provisional license provided to a new driver under 21 years of age, the duration of the provisional license will be increased from one year to two years for purposes of "moving vehicle" violations. The provisional license for persons 21 years and older will remain as a one year provisional license for purposes of moving vehicle violations.**

A. With respect to "operating-under-the-influence," the provisional license for the 16 to 20 year old age group will remain as a provisional license as required under current law - until the age of 21 years.

Driver behavior and the degree of driver maturity are very important factors with respect to fatalities and accidents among young drivers. Public hearing testimony showed that the most effective deterrent to inappropriate driving behavior is the loss of the driver's license. Extending the provisional license for an additional year will serve as a strong inducement to the youngest drivers to operate their vehicles in a mature manner, and thereby save lives.

**5. The suspension penalties for moving violations incurred under a provisional license are increased as follows:**

- A. From 30 days suspension to 60 days suspension for the first offense;**
- B. From 60 days suspension to 90 days suspension for the second offense; and**
- C. From 90 days suspension to 120 days suspension for the third and subsequent offenses.**

Since the loss of license is the most effective deterrent to dangerous driving among young drivers, increased license suspension periods for Maine's youngest drivers will have a noticeable positive impact on their driving behavior. Student testimony in regard to a 30 day license suspension period for moving vehicle violations clearly indicated that students do not think 30 days is a deterrent to risky driving behavior.

### **Operating-Under-the-Influence (OUI)**

**6. Any person who operates a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs with any passengers under the age of 21 years, will be subject to an additional suspension of 275 days.**

- A. Currently, this provision applies to operators who operate vehicles with passengers under 16 years of age (21-A MRSA §2453, sub§6, Paragraph B).

**7. The penalty for operating under the influence for persons under the age of 21 years should be increased for the second and subsequent offenses.**

- A. Currently, the penalty is loss of license for 1 year, regardless of the number of offenses that have occurred. With respect to persons 21 years of age or older, the penalties increase significantly for subsequent OUI offenses.
- B. The Task Force recommends a penalty of 2 years loss of license following the first offense and each subsequent offense for operating under the influence for drivers under the age of 21 years.

Since the loss of license is the most effective deterrent to dangerous driving among young drivers, increased license suspension periods for Maine's youngest drivers will have a noticeable positive impact on their driving behavior. Since adults, age 21 and over, are subject to increased penalties as the number of their OUI incidents increase, the Task Force proposes the same policy be applied to young drivers, who are currently subject to the same penalty regardless of the number of OUI incidents in which they are involved.

## Passenger Limitation

8. **The Task Force recommends a limitation on the number of passengers who may ride with a driver under the age of 21 years. This recommendation limits the number of passengers to the number of seat belts available in the vehicle.**

Statistics show that many accidents among young drivers occur as a result of driver distraction caused by too many friends and acquaintances riding in the vehicle with the young operator. By limiting the number of passengers to the number of seat belts who may accompany a driver under 21 years, there will be less distraction and overcrowding, which will also save lives. In the typical crash involving young drivers, more drivers and passengers are not "buckled-up" than those who are restrained. The result is more serious injuries and more deaths among those who are not restrained than those who use seat belts.

## RECOMMENDATION TO STRENGTHEN THE DRIVER EDUCATION PROGRAM IN MAINE

The Task Force supports the new rules of the Department of Secretary of State with respect to the Driver Education Program. These rules:

1. **Establish a uniform, challenging driver education curriculum**, consistent from one driver education school to another, that will improve the quality and usefulness of the information presented to students. *This provision becomes effective July 1, 1998.*
2. **Establish much higher standards for driver education instructors** that include, courses in teaching methods, successful completion of "refresher" courses every three years, successful completion of an introductory course in driver education, passage of a basic course in first aid, passage of a knowledge test with a score of at least "80," and other criteria for instructors. This provision is currently in effect.
3. **Increase the amount of student driving time from 6 hours behind the wheel to 10 hours behind the wheel.** *This provision becomes effective July 1, 1998 "*

## **RECOMMENDATION TO STRENGTHEN THE ROAD TEST OR DRIVING EXAMINATION**

Based on meetings the Secretary of State held with driver license examiners, the following revisions to the driving examination to make it more meaningful and challenging will be implemented on July 1, 1998.

1. Parallel parking and hill stops will no longer be "make or break" tests in the driver examination.
2. Other more relevant skills will be tested, such as lane changes.
3. Road tests will be longer in order to better test for the skills that are essential to roadway safety.

## **RECOMMENDATION TO REQUIRE MORE CONDITIONS FOR THE RESTORATION OF SUSPENDED LICENSES AS A RESULT OF OPERATING-UNDER-THE-INFLUENCE**

Based on statistics showing the number of repeat OUI suspensions for young drivers, the Task Force recommends that the Secretary of State impose greater conditions on the restoration of licenses than is the current practice. These conditions will include the imposition of curfews, if necessary, as well as further limitations on the number of passengers who may accompany a "restored" licensee and limitations on driving distance.

This recommendation does not require legislation. The Secretary of State is authorized by 29-A MRSA §1257 to impose conditions when restoring a license.

**RECOMMENDATION TO THE  
DEPARTMENT OF SECRETARY OF STATE  
TO FURTHER INVESTIGATE ISSUES RELATING TO  
SAFE DRIVING ON MAINE HIGHWAYS**

The Task Force on Young Drivers recommends that the Secretary of State create a task force to further investigate the problem of operating-under-the-influence among young drivers, particularly with respect to developing valid data relating to this age group. In addition, the Secretary of State is urged to look at operating-under-the-influence as it applies to all age categories and to make recommendations to address these problems. The recommendations will be made to the State Legislature no later than February 1, 2000.

The Task Force also recommends:

1. The Secretary of State conduct a study of drinking and "drugging" among drivers in the 15 to 24 year old age category, the rate of license suspensions and OUI convictions in this age category, and measures needed to reduce this problem in Maine.

The Task Force received a recommendation to reduce the "intoxication" level from .08 to .04 with respect to the 21 to 24 year old category. Since recent data shows that the "real" problem with respect to drinking and driving is not limited exclusively to the ages between 21 and 24 years, the Secretary of State is directed to study this issue with respect to drivers of all ages.

2. The Secretary of State study the findings and recommendations of driving experiments and epidemiological studies, showing that operation of a vehicle with a blood alcohol concentration above 0.05% poses a very serious danger to other highway users. Since no state has yet lowered the blood alcohol standard below 0.08 for adult drivers, the Task Force recommends the continued review of the appropriate state blood alcohol standard for adult drivers.
3. The Secretary of State review the "open container" law and make any recommendations necessary for the protection of the public safety;
4. The Secretary of State consider a special course for problem drivers who incur violations to a greater degree than the average driver for the purpose of determining the most effective measures to be applied to these drivers, including, but not limited to, special courses in safe driving.



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