

To the esteemed members of the State of Minnesota Transportation Committee:

Change is needed for the process to obtain a MN driver's license. The current process is fraught with inefficiencies and excessive wait times that impede the ability for proficient drivers to obtain a license. We currently have two children with driver's licenses and a third turning 16 this summer. We have two other children under 14 who will go through this process in the future. So, I have a vested interest in ensuring improvements are achieved. Our oldest daughter obtained her license at our local DMV office in La Crescent. We scheduled her test more than six months in advance in order to get a slot. Our son recently obtained his license after rescheduling multiple times due to the pandemic. I had originally scheduled his test 8 months prior in order to get a slot close to home. After his test was cancelled due to COVID, I went online daily to reschedule – first in Mankato for September and then found an opening in Rochester (still an hour away, but closer to his original test date). On June 8, when the testing schedule was reopened to the public, we went online at 12:01am to schedule our third child's test looking for the first available opening anywhere in the state – mid-September. Obtaining a test appointment was supposed to be a simple task but turned in to requiring a full day off work and multiple attempts to schedule an appointment. While my son was taking his test, I talked to other parents from Detroit Lakes and the metro area who traveled many hours to take their test. Some of the testing centers do not offer the licensing so an additional appointment is required at a different location to obtain the license even after passing the test. La Crescent parents are driving 10 hours round trip in order to get a test that isn't six months out. Having only 14 open locations (located in high rate COVID locations no less) across the state is untenable for the future; more access to convenient locations are needed across the state. Taking a test in an unfamiliar community may also drive up first test failure rates. I urge the committee to study this as well.

These scheduling issues are not a new phenomenon in Minnesota. I urge the Transportation committee to consider alternatives such as contracting with a third party to offer tests as part of the driver's education curriculum and/or implementing a random audit process. Currently 30 states require a road test to obtain a driver's license. Wisconsin and Georgia recently switched to a parental signoff program; parents can still request a road exam. Iowa has had a parental signoff for many years. In other states, including Illinois and Indiana, driving instructors can administer the exam and the state requires the DMV to randomly test student drivers. They accomplish this via a date drawing where students with one of three birthdates in that month must take a road test. In all of these states, parents can still require their child to take a road test. Those drivers cross state lines and are driving on MN roads. Is there evidence of more crashes or unsafe driving practices in those states?

Obtaining a driver's license is an important milestone and is not something to be taken lightly. A license provides opportunities for employment, independent travel to activities, and freedom for both the driver and those who need to transport said driver (VERY important for a family the size of ours). With opportunity comes responsibility. My husband and I are employed full time and have a household of five very active children. We are raising them to be conscientious contributors to society. They volunteer for local causes, participate in sports, music extra-curricular activities and have part time jobs. It is completely reasonable for them to have an opportunity to obtain a license after they have put in the time, effort and demonstrated proficient and safe driving skills. I would not allow my child to drive independently if I felt it was unsafe and I hope any responsible parent would do the same. I realize the committee and legislature needs to make these decisions for a larger population and cannot make these recommendations on one case alone. I implore the committee to advocate for alternatives to the current process such as those described above while maintaining convenient access to local DMV locations for all citizens of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Pauline Byom  
La Crescent, MN resident