

**Written Testimony of Safeway Driving School**  
**RE: Online Driver's Education**  
**May 3, 2021**

Good afternoon. I am Charles Hayssen, president of Safeway Driving School. Safeway has been teaching driver's education to teens for 52 years and, because of our partnership with 17 Metro-area school districts, we currently teach about 30% of all metro teens annually. Safeway Driving School opposes the online driver's education bill currently included in the Senate Omnibus Transportation bill but not in the House version (HF1684) for the following reasons:

1. **Not as Represented (synchronous vs. asynchronous).** As background, a synchronous class is just that – teachers and students meet and advance through the curriculum together, at the same time and in synchrony with each other. Asynchronous is just the opposite, like asymmetry is the opposite of symmetry. There are no times or places for common instruction – instruction is strictly self-study that students complete if, as and when they want to.

With that fundamental understanding, the Senate bill is not what it is represented as being. The MN Senate Republican Caucus says this about their online driver's education bill:

*The bill would allow driver's education students to take the classroom portion of their instruction online. A number of communities adapted to the governor's stay-home order at the start of the coronavirus outbreak by allowing all students to take driver's ed courses online. This provision [their online driver's education bill] would make that option available to everyone permanently.*

However, this is simply false. A more informed and accurate description is this:

The bill would allow driver's education students to take the classroom portion of their instruction online. **Virtually all driver's education programs in the State** ~~A number of communities~~ adapted to the governor's stay-home order at the start of the coronavirus outbreak by allowing all students to take **live, teacher-led** driver's ed courses online. This provision would **eliminate** ~~make~~ that option, **already** available to everyone, **and** permanently **replace it with over 1,000 static, on-demand slides clicked through over 30 hours with no teacher involvement whatsoever.**

2. **Non-Compliant.** Pre-pandemic, teenagers could take dozens of high school courses "online", as defined by the MN Dept of Education. That means teacher-led. The driver's education instruction that the variance currently allows also complies with MN Dept of Education standards. By coincidence, we currently have the best of both worlds – curriculum already reviewed and approved by DPS with existing staff that also meets the DoE high school instruction standards. What's proposed requires all new review and approval (hence the need for an additional staff member) that won't meet the DoE standards. What are we thinking of?
3. **Undesirable Provenance.** The bill is being pushed by AAA Washington DC which now has an asynchronous course. They didn't when *driversed.com* was pushing their product in 2007, 2009 and

2011. At that time, they testified against asynchronous driver's education. But now they have the product and have switched teams. Why? 63,000 teens took driver's ed last year in MN. At \$100 per student, that's a \$6.3 million market annually – over \$60 million in the next ten years. That's why. We are considering this bill, not because the citizens of the state are asking for it, not because the driver's education schools are asking for it, not because the instructors are asking for it and not because public safety experts are asking for it. We are considering it because an organization in Washington DC wants to open the MN market for their product.

4. **Destructive.** It will destroy MN's ecosystem of driver's education programs. The ecosystem has over 200 high school programs, from Sleepy Eye with 35 students per year to Anoka-Hennepin with 2,300, plus 120 commercial schools. All of that is at risk of significant disruption, none for the better.

Ohio passed *driversed.com's* online bill in 2011. According to Stacey Thompson, Driver Training Program Administrator in Ohio in an email to Safeway dated 02/28/21, since then:

- "We have seen a decrease in the number of brick & mortar schools."
  - "We also have several schools who actually refuse working with online students because of a safety factor."
  - "As for numbers, we currently have around 260 licensed enterprises. This is a dramatic decrease in previous years as we had over 400."
  - "I can tell you that our first reporting year for online (2014), we issued over 2,400 [online classroom completion] certificates. Last year over 44,700 certificates were issued."
5. **"Just an Option".** Proponents of the current bill highlight the convenience of their proposal and argue that "it is just an option." However, it is a highly disruptive and bad option. And its convenience comes at the expense of effectiveness. Convenience hasn't exempted high school Algebra from being taught by a teacher, whether online or in person, nor has it exempted Chemistry or World History. Are proponents of the current bill saying MN DoE's standards for online high school curriculum is silly or unnecessary? Driver's ed and public safety are too important to have its effectiveness undermined by convenience.

Across the State, public school driving instructors, Education Minnesota, the Minnesota Community Education Association and the owners and instructors at commercial driving schools are in agreement in their opposition to this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Charles Hayssen  
President  
Safeway Driving School