

Reduce Course Hours for Driving Safety Classes To Increase Participation and Save Lives

[HF 4587; Rep. Bierman /SF727; Sen. Nelson]

Background:

Safe driving is a challenge for drivers of all ages. Although today's older Americans live a healthier lifestyle than the generations before them, they are still more likely than younger drivers to experience vision, hearing, or other impairments that could create risks while on the road. Because this generation of older drivers is so large, traffic safety experts are concerned that the numbers of "at-risk" drivers will increase as the boomers age.

In response to growing National crash records for older drivers, AARP developed the Smart Driver course, the nation's first and largest course designed specifically for drivers aged 50 and older. The program has served more than 20 million people since its inception in 1979.

In 1984, Minnesota created rules requiring drivers 65 and older to be eligible for a 10% auto insurance discount when participating in an **eight-hour** course. Over time, the rules were revised to include drivers 55 and over, and a four-hour refresher course was introduced that must be completed every three years to be eligible for the insurance discount.

AARP conducted an extensive study involving participants in the classroom and online courses. Findings from the study showed that:

- over nine in 10 (93%) reported changing at least one key driving behavior for the better as a result of what they learned in the course.
- Over eight in 10 participants (83%) felt that information they learned in the course prevented them from being in a crash.
- Over seven in 10 (73%) participants believe their driving skills improved because of taking the course, and 84% were likely to recommend it.

However, when participants in the eight-hour course were asked what they least liked about the course, they said it was the course length, and thus participation has been declining.

Problem:

The problem is course participation numbers have declined and suffered in states with eight-hour courses. Despite the 55-plus population in Minnesota growing from 1 to 1.7 million in the last ten years, class participation has declined by 27%.

As a result, many at-risk residents are not getting the information about state traffic laws, driving techniques, and strategies they need to be safer on the roads. With traffic deaths on the rise and the highest since 2005 and traffic congestion at an all-time high, one way to keep older drivers on the road safely is to maintain their driving skills through education.

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According to national data, traffic deaths increased by 10.5% in 2021, and traffic fatalities rose by 14% for drivers 65 and older.

According to MN traffic data, while the number of traffic fatalities has declined from an all-time high in 2021 of 488 deaths to 444 deaths, the percentage of traffic crash fatalities has risen from 34.5% to 39.2 % for the 55+ age group. These numbers hold even after adjusting for an overall increase in vehicle miles traveled in the period.

That's why AARP supports reducing the course length from 8 to 4 hours without sacrificing content or quality to encourage more participation.

- An independent study comparing the four- and eight-hour courses found that course length had no significant impact on the amount of knowledge drivers retained.
- The same study found that drivers were equally as likely to change 19 safe driving behaviors for the better, whether they took the four-hour or the eight-hour course.
- Participants in both the four- and eight-hour courses had similar levels of behavior change, suggesting that participants in the short course learned as much as participants in the longer, eight-hour course.

Solution:

Support SF 727/HF 4587 and join eighteen states that require a course length of four hours. Of those, nine states already require mandatory insurance discounts for four-hour courses. AARP's four-hour course allows participants to attend a shorter version of their eight-hour course without sacrificing content or quality. AARP achieved this by cutting back on discussion time and engagement activities.

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