

5-3-2021

Dear Senators ,

Please take into consideration the following, dealing with online driver education.

ALL driver education programs in Minnesota are under the Commissioner of Public Safety. Whether by Zoom or in-person, driving schools must meet MN requirements as outlined in Statutes 7411 and be accountable to the Director of Driver Education and the Commissioner of Public Safety. Online classes, as written in this bill, do not meet these requirements. If I'm reading the bill correctly, online **WOULD NOT** be accountable to the Minnesota Director of Driver Education and the Commissioner of Public Safety. That is hardly a level playing field for all the other approved programs in MN.

Mr. Van Tassel represents the National AAA Foundation. He is supporting SF 255 because it is in the best interest of the National AAA Foundation financially. The National AAA does not offer a follow-up BTW program in MN, leaving families to research and find their own Behind the Wheel providers. There is **ONE** AAA brick and mortar school here in St. Louis Park, MN that operates as a private business, offering classroom and BTW. This school is operated by AAA Minneapolis and is not associated with the National AAA Foundation. The National AAA Foundation and Mr. VanTassel do not represent Minnesota driving school programs. They are pushing their own agenda to line their own pockets. They do not even have to be located here in Minnesota to operate.

Online IS NOT the same as teleconferenced or Zoom classes. What is the difference?

The difference between online and teleconferences and Zoom classes is they require an adult present on the students end to supervise the student. Classes must be overseen by an adult on the student's end. On the teaching end, an instructor must be present to teach, answer questions, lead discussions, and interact with students. The instructor must have visual (face-to-face) contact with the students. Online as proposed in the bill, are pushing a static, computer program. It is not a face-to-face teaching experience. Online does not have human contact. We believe human contact is essential to reaching teens. We have spent our lives teaching teens how to drive safely and do not believe a static computer program will be as effective.

Background.... the Governor provided a variance for driver's education to use Zoom or "teleconferenced classroom" due to Covid. This variance has allowed driver's education to operate. This variance can and will be rescinded when the pandemic is under control. We will all go back to in-person classes across the State.

We are still assessing the ramifications of Zoom instruction to see how students learned. If anything, we would be open to keeping the current variance in place for one year to evaluate how students absorbed the classroom material and applied it to their driving.

What does this mean to Minnesota students & families? What does this mean to Minnesota driver education programs? Most programs, public, private or commercial, offer three choices to those seeking driver education:

A. Classroom and BTW, as a package for \$380-\$450.

B. Classroom only for \$100-\$200. It is very rare that this option is used. It usually involves a move with plans to take BTW after they move.

C. Behind the wheel only \$300 -\$400. This option also can involve a student that moves into our area after taking classroom elsewhere. Or if the student is totally and completely enrolled in homeschool.

I foresee that if the online change passes, many potential new drivers will take driver ed online because it is convenient. I also see driving programs increasing BTW only prices due to lost classroom revenue. The possibility also exists that companies might even refuse to offer BTW to those who take online classroom. The fiscal cost to the state may end up being nothing. The cost to students and parents may be a lot more.

Please realize, most of the driver education programs in Minnesota are not “big business.” My husband and I own Range Driver Training. We have serviced students for over 45 years in the following areas; Virginia, Eveleth, Ely, Cook, Orr, Babbitt, Cherry, Mt Iron, Aurora, Hoyt Lakes, Tower and Biwabik. We work with the schools to bring driver education to them. We wear many hats, doing everything from classroom to behind the wheel. We make sure cars are serviced and answer our own phone. We are a “wheels on the road, feet in the classroom” program.

If you have any questions concerning driver education, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

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