

The 60-Hour Practice Driving Law: Unintended Consequences for Maryland's Economy

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Maryland has some of the most restrictive driver's licensing requirements in the nation. In fact, Maryland is the only state that requires new drivers of all ages to complete identical driver's education and practice requirements. A set of new laws, which increased the requirements even further, was designed to reduce crashes and improve traffic safety, particularly among novice teenagers. Unfortunately, this has resulted in an unnecessary barrier to a successful local economy by hindering mobility and employment for low-wage workers.

Maryland's New Licensing Laws

In 2005, the Maryland legislature passed a series of vehicle laws intended to increase driving safety, particularly among teenage drivers. Only two of the five new laws, however, included language specifically targeting drivers under 18. The other three laws, which increased licensing requirements, apply broadly to all rookie drivers under the Maryland Graduated Licensing system. *All* new drivers must now hold a learner's permit for at least six months before getting a provisional license, and hold a provisional license for 18 months with no violations before getting a full license. Most significantly, the minimum amount of certified driving practice required to get a license was increased from 40 to 60 hours.ⁱ

These new laws mean that every beginning driver—from a 16-year-old high school student to a 50-year-old working parent—must fulfill an extensive set of driving practice requirements. Since there is already a mandatory Driver's Education course that includes 30 hours of classroom

and six hours of behind-the-wheel experience, the 60-hour law means that new drivers must complete over two work weeks of supervised preparation.

Steps to Getting a Maryland License

4. Provisional License:

18 months violation-free driving under provisional restrictions

3. Supervised Practice:

60 Hours Learner Time, 60 Hours Supervisor Time, Cost of gas & car

2. Learner's Permit:

6 months of driving under learner's restrictions

1. Driver's Education:

30 Hours Classroom, 6 Hours Behind the Wheel, \$250-\$300 Enrollment Cost

These requirements have the unintended consequence of making driver's licenses less accessible to local workers. Since many employers require access to a car, this limits who can apply for open positions, and makes it hard for workers to find and keep a decent job. Finding the time to complete the requirements, in addition to gas money, a car, and a friend or relative willing to supervise, creates a new obstacle to mobility. Changing the coverage of the law would remove this barrier to a strong local economy.

Local Jobs Require a Valid License

For Maryland's low-wage workforce, the ability to drive is critical. It is hard to get to work without a car. We operate in a regional economy—in fact, almost half of all workers in Maryland travel to another county for their job.ⁱⁱ Despite this reality,

public transit options are limited. Many suburban employers are not linked to bus and rail lines. When they are, transit schedules do not always accommodate night and weekend shifts. This makes it difficult for many residents to access the wide array of jobs outside of Maryland's urban centers.

It is also hard to access certain types of jobs without a driver's license.

Employers in industries like construction, where low-skill workers can often find family-supporting wages, have a strong hiring preference for applicants who can get themselves reliably to and

from the worksite, and who can drive company vehicles while on the clock. Jobs in industries like security and utilities may simply require the ability to drive. Furthermore, some employers require proof of a valid license as a condition of employment, regardless of the need to drive on the job.

Outcomes are better for workers who are able to drive, and therefore access the full labor market. Ways to Work, a program that helps low-income workers obtain cars, has found that once their clients have a car, they see an average 41 percent increase in salary. They also miss fewer days of work, and arrive on time more often.^v

This benefits both workers and employers.

The ability to drive also means flexibility for working families. On average, workers who rely on public transit spend twice as long getting to their job.^{vi} It is also more difficult for them to complete basic household duties such as grocery shopping

and taking children to school, childcare, or extra-curricular activities. Without the ability to drive, these simple activities can become time-consuming chores.

In order for Maryland's workers, families, and economy to thrive, we need to reconsider the licensing laws impeding the mobility of our novice adult drivers.

Maryland Laws More Restrictive

Maryland driver's licensing requirements are more stringent than any other state on a number of measures. Most states require either Driver's Education or certified driving practice. In Maryland, however, we require both.

US Licensing Requirements- How Maryland Compares

		Maryland ⁱⁱⁱ	Total States ^{iv}
Driver's Ed Plus Certified Practice	Required	×	24
	Applies to Adults Over 21	×	ONLY MD
Certified Practice Hours	Required	×	37
	50+ Hours Required	×	2 *
	Applies to Adults Over 21	×	ONLY MD
Driver's Education	Required	×	36
	Applies to Adults Over 21	×	ONLY MD
Graduated Licensing w/ Provisional Phase	Required	×	46
	Applies to Adults Over 21	×	2

^{*}Only Maryland and Kentucky require more than 50 hours. Oregon requires 50 hours for teens who take driver's education, but teens can opt not to take the course and instead complete 100 hours of practice.

Among the states that do require both types of preparation, only two states—Kentucky and Maryland—require an additional 60 hours of practice. In other states with both requirements, the number of hours varies from a minimum of 12 in Massachusetts to

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a maximum of 50 in nine other states. In states that require practice only, with no Driver's Education, new drivers are only required to complete 20 to 50 hours of practice.

More importantly, Maryland is the only state that applies its licensing requirements evenly to drivers of all ages. In most states, graduated licensing, driver's education, and practice requirements apply only to young drivers. In a few states, more extensive laws apply to drivers under 21, and in the majority of states, they apply only to drivers under 18.

Laws Exceed Recommended Standards

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety released a blueprint for graduated drivers' licensing systems in 2004. They cite young

drivers as the primary target for such laws, since they represent the largest group of beginners, and have the highest rate of auto

accidents. They recommend applying graduated licensing to this group, and consider it optional to apply licensing laws more broadly to older drivers. They do not consider universal coverage essential to a strong, safety-oriented law.

Institute experts recommend that beginning drivers complete a minimum number of certified practice hours, but even for teenagers they only advise a standard of 30-50 hours. This is the only mandatory preparation they advise. They do not consider driver's education an essential component of preparation, citing that traditional driver education has not been shown to reduce crashes.^{vii}

Lifting Barriers to a Strong Economy

Maryland's licensing laws far exceed the standards recommended for safe driver

preparation. The state mandates participation in a costly driver's education course, requires an excessive number of certified practice hours, and extends our laws beyond the immature teenage drivers most at risk for crashes.

Age is a factor in behind-the-wheel safety, apart from experience. We know that teenagers are more likely to be involved in auto accidents. While inexperience may contribute to this trend, sheer maturity also plays a role, as young drivers tend to engage in riskier behavior. Data on auto accidents in Maryland support this notion. In 2004 and 2005, 36 intermediate license holders were in fatal crashes, and all of them were between the ages of 16 and 18.^{viii} For this high-risk group, our strict practice requirements are a reasonable barrier to full driving privileges.

For adults who need a license to access jobs, transport their families, and manage household responsibilities, the barriers to getting a license are too high. Maryland, like other states, can ensure safety without creating a barrier to economic success by tailoring our laws more appropriately to different age groups. Lifting or reducing the supervised preparation requirements for adults would alleviate a significant burden on working families trying to get ahead, and would strengthen our state's economy.

About JOTF

The mission of JOTF is to develop and advocate policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers.

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Maryland can ensure safety without creating a barrier to economic success by tailoring our laws to different age groups.

Notes & References

- ⁱ Information compiled from the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration.
- ⁱⁱ Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland State Data Center. "Journey –to-Work Commutation Summary for Maryland's Jurisdictions- 2000." http://www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/commutation/commute00_idx.htm
- ⁱⁱⁱ Information compiled from the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration.
- ^{iv} Information compiled from AAA Public Affairs "State GDL Laws," <http://www.aaapublicaffairs.com/Assets/Files/200610101643250.GDLLaws.doc>, and review of state websites.
- ^v Ways to Work. "2006 Program Evaluation: Selected Outcomes." [http://www.waystowork.org/documents/Evaluations/Evaluation% 20Claims-1pg%20\(Oct%2706\).pdf](http://www.waystowork.org/documents/Evaluations/Evaluation%20Claims-1pg%20(Oct%2706).pdf)
- ^{vi} Margy Waller. "High Cost or High Opportunity Cost? Transportation and Family Economic Success." The Brookings Institution, December 2005. <http://www.brookings.edu/es/research/projects/wrb/publications/pb/pb35.pdf>
- ^{vii} Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Traffic Injury Research Foundation. "Graduated Licensing: A Blueprint for North America." http://www.iihs.org/laws/state_laws/pdf/blueprint.pdf
- ^{viii} Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) Web-Based Encyclopedia. <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/>