

H.147

An act relating to the operation of a motor vehicle by junior operators and primary safety belt enforcement

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

This act shall be known as and may be cited as the “Highway Traffic Safety Act of 2009.”

* * * Legislative Findings * * *

Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

The general assembly finds that:

* * * General Findings * * *

(1) In December 2006, the governor transmitted to the Division Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration the Strategic Highway Plan for Vermont that stated “The first half of 2006 was trending toward a near record-breaking year for highway deaths and incapacitating injuries.” In response to this trend, the Strategic Highway Safety Plan for Vermont was created with the mission to “minimize the occurrence and severity of crashes, related human suffering, and economic losses on the Vermont transportation network.”

(2) According to the governor’s highway safety office, traffic crashes cost the nation about \$230 billion each year in medical expenses, lost

productivity, property damage, and related costs. Vermont pays \$221 million of those costs. In 2008, workplace traffic crash injuries cost Vermonters more than \$39 million.

(3) According to the governor's highway safety program, each highway fatality cost the state of Vermont more than \$900,000.00.

(4) In recognition of the terrible toll in terms of human suffering and financial loss resulting from motor vehicle crashes, on July 6, 2006, the Vermont department of health's injury prevention program hosted the 2006 Symposium on Preventing Crashes Among Young Drivers at the Inn at Essex, Vermont. The symposium brought together key leaders in highway safety, transportation, public health, and youth development for an in-depth multidisciplinary exploration of the causes of crashes among young drivers and opportunities for prevention.

* * * Teen Driving Safety * * *

(1) The Strategic Highway Safety Plan for Vermont of 2006, signed by the governor and endorsed by state agencies, stated that "new language" should be added to the existing graduated driver license legislation to achieve:

(A) Restrictions on passengers in cars driven by young drivers.

(B) Nighttime limitations for young drivers.

(C) Primary safety belt enforcement to the age of 18.

(D) No cell phone or electronic device use by junior operators.

(2) From a public health perspective, “motor vehicle crashes are among the most serious problems facing teenagers.” (Anatomy of Crashes Involving Young Drivers-Preventing Teen Motor Crashes.) According to the Centers for Disease Control, highway injuries and deaths constitute the largest reason for youth injuries and deaths, and therefore constitute a public health risk warranting remedial action.

(3) According to the above sources, the 2002 cost of crashes involving drivers ages 20 through 25 was \$40.8 billion (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2006).

(4) According to the Vermont Safety Education Center (VSEC), junior operator passenger restrictions are essential components of graduated licensing. Crash risks for teenage drivers increases incrementally with one, two, three or more passengers. With three or more passengers, fatal crash risk is about three times higher than when a beginner is driving alone.

(5) According to VSEC, the presence of passengers is a major contributor to the teenage death toll. About two-thirds of all crash deaths of teens that involve 16-year-old drivers occur when the beginners were driving with teen passengers. Studies indicate that passenger restrictions can reduce this problem.

(6) According to VSEC, four out of every 10 deaths of teens in motor vehicles occur between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Nighttime is one of the riskiest times

of day for junior operators due to DUI, darkness, and sleep deprivation in teens. Midnight to 2 a.m. is the most dangerous nighttime period.

* * * Cell Phones and Electronic Devices * * *

(1) The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration policy on cell phones states, “The primary responsibility of the driver is to operate a motor vehicle safely. The task of driving requires full attention and focus. Cell phone use can distract drivers from this task, risking harm to themselves and others. Therefore, the safest course of action is to refrain from using a cell phone while driving.”

(2) Teens, driving, and cell phones are a dangerous mix due to teens’ vulnerability to distractions and accidents (“Most Wanted Transportation Safety Improvements,” National Transportation Safety Board, November 2008).

(3) In 2008, the National Safety Council called for a ban on cell phones while driving, stating that “drivers talking on a cell phone are four times as likely to have an accident as drivers who are not.”

* * * Safety Belts * * *

(1) States with primary enforcement average 10-percent higher usage than states with secondary enforcement.

(2) A crash involving an unrestrained person costs 55 percent more than for someone who was restrained.

(3) Approximately 74 percent of the costs associated with crashes are paid for by society; the victim pays the balance.

(4) Traffic crashes are not just an enforcement issue.

* * * Junior Operator Nighttime Restriction * * *

Sec. 3. 23 V.S.A. § 614(c) and (d) are added to read:

(c) A person operating with a junior operator's license shall not operate a motor vehicle between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m., except when carrying the signed and dated written permission of a parent or guardian that contains the parent's or guardian's contact information, including a home and work address and telephone numbers, or except when:

(1) traveling on a direct route between work and home;

(2) traveling for a school-related activity; or

(3) going to or returning from hunting or fishing, provided the operator has in his or her possession hunting or fishing equipment and a valid hunting or fishing license.

(d) A person in violation of subsection (c) of this section shall be allowed to drive his or her vehicle on a direct route home, following issuance of a traffic ticket by a law enforcement officer.

* * * Safety Restriction on the Use of Wireless Telephones and Handheld
Electronic Devices by Junior Operators * * *

Sec. 4. 23 V.S.A. § 1095a is added to read:

§ 1095a. USE OF WIRELESS TELEPHONES AND HANDHELD
ELECTRONIC DEVICES

(a)(1) For the purposes of this section, “wireless telephone” shall mean a
telephone that is:

(A) capable of sending or receiving telephone communications
without being physically connected to a telephone wire or cord; and

(B) used pursuant to a subscription with a commercial entity that
provides wireless telephone service.

(2) “Wireless telephone” shall not be construed to include:

(A) a two-way radio that is operated by using a push-to-talk feature
and does not require proximity to the ear of the user; or

(B) a communication feature of a voice-activated global positioning
or navigation system that is affixed within the passenger compartment of a
motor vehicle.

(b) For the purposes of this section, “hands-free use” shall refer to the use
of a mobile telephone or electronic communication device that has an internal
feature or function, or that is equipped with an attachment or addition, whether
or not permanently part of the mobile telephone or electronic communication

device, by which a user engages in a conversation without the use of either hand; provided, however, this definition shall not preclude the use of either hand to activate, deactivate, or initiate a function of the telephone or device.

(c) Subject to the exceptions set forth in subsection (b) of this section, for the purposes of this section, the term “use,” when referring to the utilization of a wireless telephone or handheld electronic device, shall include telephone calls, texting, and all other functions.

(d) A person under 18 years of age shall not use any wireless telephone or handheld electronic device while operating a motor vehicle on the traveled portion of the highway. This prohibition shall not apply if it is necessary to place an emergency 911 call.

(e) A person 18 years of age or older shall not use a wireless telephone or electronic communication device while operating a motor vehicle on the traveled portion of a highway. This prohibition shall not apply to:

(1) hands-free use;

(2) placement of an emergency 911 call; or

(3) use by the following persons for the purpose of and during the course of performing their official duties:

(A) law enforcement officers;

(B) firefighters;

(C) operators of authorized emergency vehicles as defined in section 4 of this title; and

(D) state or municipal employees and their contractors who are actively engaged in road maintenance activities.

Sec. 5. WIRELESS TELEPHONE AND HANDHELD ELECTRONIC
DEVICE REPORT

By July 1, 2011, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the Vermont State Firefighters Association, and the Vermont department of public safety, after consulting with their constituents and other appropriate entities whether or not under their direct control, shall submit to the house committee on judiciary a report regarding their constituents' progress toward utilization of hands-free communications technology in the course of motor vehicle operation.

* * * Primary Enforcement of Safety Belt Law; Federal Funds * * *

Sec. 6. REPEAL; PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT OF SAFETY BELT LAW;
ACCEPTANCE OF FEDERAL FUNDS

(a) 23 V.S.A. § 1259(e) (secondary enforcement of safety belt law) is repealed.

(b) The state is authorized to accept any additional funding available from the federal government attributable to the passage of this section.

* * * Operation by a Junior Operator After Recall is a Civil Violation * * *

Sec. 7. 23 V.S.A. § 676 is amended to read:

§ 676. OPERATION AFTER SUSPENSION, REVOCATION, ~~OR~~

REFUSAL, OR RECALL - CIVIL VIOLATION

(a) A person whose license or privilege to operate a motor vehicle has been revoked, suspended ~~or~~, refused, or recalled by the commissioner of motor vehicles for any reason other than a violation of sections 1091(b), 1094(b), 1128(b) or (c), or 1201 or a suspension under section 1205 of this title and who operates or attempts to operate a motor vehicle upon a public highway before the license or privilege of the person to operate a motor vehicle has been reinstated by the commissioner commits a civil traffic violation.

(b) In establishing a prima facie case against a person accused of violating this section, the judicial bureau shall accept as evidence, a printout attested to by the law enforcement officer as the person's motor vehicle record showing convictions and resulting license suspensions. The admitted motor vehicle record shall establish a permissive inference that the person was under suspension or had his or her license revoked or recalled on the dates and time periods set forth in the record. The judicial bureau shall not require a certified copy of the person's motor vehicle record from the department of motor vehicles to establish the permissive inference.

AS PASSED BY HOUSE
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Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect from passage.