



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

DAN KNODL

STATE SENATOR • 8TH DISTRICT

Senate Bill 396

Public Testimony

Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government

October 24, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Tomczyk and members of the committee for holding this hearing on Senate Bill 396.

This bill will help ensure that young adults can learn how to drive safely regardless of their income. It establishes a dedicated driver education grant program for students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch, using funds that have been made available through the 2023-25 budget.

According to data from a 2012 analysis published in the *Annals of Advances in Automotive Medicine*, an unlicensed teen driver is 11 times more likely to be injured in a car crash than a licensed teen. They also are more likely to engage in high-risk driving behaviors including speeding, driving under the influence, and not wearing a seat belt.

Unfortunately, the rate of traffic accidents is trending in the wrong direction, as is the rate of teenagers receiving driver education. According to the most recent data from the Federal Highway Administration, the share of teenagers with driver's licenses has dropped from 64% in 1995 to 40% in 2021.

Making our roads safer will save taxpayer dollars in addition to saving lives. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, traffic crashes cost the American economy \$340 billion in 2019, including \$30 billion in direct costs to taxpayers.

The public is taking notice. In the Milwaukee area, reckless driving in particular has become a crisis, and I have had several constituents reach out to express their concerns on this issue. One constituent has had two friends killed in Milwaukee by speeding drivers going through red lights. Another reported seeing teens using stolen cars to learn how to drive.

I am happy to report that Senate Bill 396 has bipartisan co-sponsorship in both houses. I am appreciative of the work that Representative Donovan has done to address this important issue not only in Milwaukee, but throughout our state. Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and we would be happy to answer any questions you have.



BOB DONOVAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 84TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 237-9184

Toll-Free: (888) 534-0084

Rep.Donovan@legis.wisconsin.gov

P.O. Box 8952

Madison, WI 53708-8952

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 396

Thank you members of the Committee on State Affairs for meeting today to hear public testimony on Senate Bill 396, which would create a driver's education grant program for Wisconsin.

Thousands of Wisconsinites use our roadways every day for travel and work. We sometimes forget the dangers that come with driving a 2,000 lb vehicles hurtling down the freeway. Although convenient, our vehicles can inflict catastrophic damage if used improperly or in unexperienced hands.

We have seen a steady decrease in young adults obtaining drivers licenses over the last 40 years – especially ages 16-18. These young adults are at the most risk of auto accidents and many still drive without obtaining a license. Law enforcement has even noted this issue, calling it an “epidemic” that needs to be solved.

When I was a kid, Wisconsin funded driver's education. We were taught about the dangers of driving and what the consequences could be. Today, we have young adults that drive recklessly or forgo driver's education all together – driving dangerously or even illegally. While this will not completely solve reckless driving, we have removed the financial barrier for those that may have otherwise not participated in driver's education. Our entire state benefits when our young adults are trained in the rules of the road – making us all safer.

Senate Bill 396 creates a driver's education grant program for Wisconsin. The Department of Transportation would be charged with establishing and administering the program. Grant money would be available to students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in public, choice, charter and home schools. This grant program will be funded by the \$6 million investment in the recent biennial budget. This is not new money and is funded by the insurance industries fees and payments to Wisconsin.

I want to thank the bipartisan group of legislators who also recognized this as a worthy issue and decided to co-sponsor this legislation. Wisconsin has an opportunity to improve our roadway safety through improved education and investment in our young adults. Committee members, please join me in supporting Senate Bill 396. I would be happy to respond to any questions or concerns about the legislation.



Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary
4822 Madison Yards Way, S903
Madison, WI 53705

Governor Tony Evers
Secretary Craig Thompson
wisconsindot.gov
Telephone: (608) 266-1114
FAX: (608) 266-9912
Email: sec.exec@dot.wi.gov

Testimony of WisDOT Assistant Deputy Secretary Joel Nilsestuen Before the
Senate Committee on Transportation on Assembly Bill 394
October 24, 2023

Thank you for your time and consideration of AB 394, relating to a driver education grant program. Creating a driver education grant program is a laudable effort and a successful program will benefit both grant recipients and the traveling public. The department appreciates the willingness of the bill authors to work with us to address several issues via AA1 to AB 394. They include: specifying that grants are intended for drivers education for the operation of Class D vehicles, clarifying language on reimbursable costs, and granting the department rulemaking authority. These changes are supported by the department and resolve the points of concern the department had with AB 394.

Again, we appreciate the willingness of the bill authors and the committee to work to resolve these issues with the department's input. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact either myself or the department's legislative advisor, Kathey Bilek at 608-266-1114 or via e-mail.