



# BOB DONOVAN

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## Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 394

Thank you members of the Committee on State Affairs for meeting today to hear public testimony on Assembly Bill 394, 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 inexperienced 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.

Assembly Bill 394 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 Assembly Bill 394. I would be happy to respond to any questions or concerns about the legislation.



**Wisconsin Insurance Alliance**  
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TO: Members of the Assembly State Affairs Committee

FROM: Andy Franken

RE: Support Assembly Bill 394, relating to establishing a driver education grant program.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Insurance Alliance, I respectfully request your support for Assembly Bill 394, relating to the establishment of a driver education grant program. As you may know, the Joint Committee on Finance approved a \$6 million appropriation to provide drivers education grants in the 2023-25 state budget.

The Wisconsin Insurance Alliance is a state trade association of property and casualty insurance companies. Our membership ranges from some of the largest property and casualty insurers in the country to the regional and state-based Wisconsin insurance companies, many of whom write automobile insurance.

As background, from 1961 until 2004, the State of Wisconsin funded driver's education through a categorical aid program. With state budget cuts in 2004, the funding ended, but the State still requires youth under 18 to enroll in a school or commercial driving program as a condition of obtaining a learner permit and probationary license. Many teens are forgoing driver education and training due to costs of commercial driving programs. The results have led to more dangerous roads and high crash and fatality rates.

- Teens aged 15-20 without driver education are responsible for 91% of teen driver crashes. (Oregon Study, 2018)
- For drivers ages 16-17, the fatal crash rate per mile driven is triple the rate for drivers ages 20 and older. (IIHS, 2021)
- For drivers ages 16-19, the crash rate per mile driven is nearly 4 times the rate for drivers ages 20 and older. (IIHS, 2021)
- When a teen driver has an additional passenger with them, the risk of them getting into a fatal car crash doubles. If two or more passengers are present, the odds are five times as likely. (TeenSafe, 2018)

The Wisconsin Insurance Alliance requests your support of this implementation legislation.



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

**DAN KNODL**

STATE SENATOR • 8<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

**Assembly Bill 394**

Written Testimony

Assembly Committee on State Affairs

September 20, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Swearingen and members of the committee for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 394.

Reckless driving has become a crisis in Wisconsin, and the public is demanding action. Here is a sample of the comments I have received from constituents in just the past few months:

*"We have had three high speed chases end on our boulevard over the past month. With the last one the car was rammed into a neighbor's house."*

*"I have had two friends killed in Milwaukee by speeding drivers going through red lights."*

*"When I was living in Milwaukee, I saw teens using stolen cars to learn how to drive. They took turns driving it around the neighborhood. Every day, I see reckless driving in Milwaukee. I think driver ed classes would help reduce their dangerous actions."*

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. 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.

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.

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.

I am happy to report that Assembly Bill 394 has bipartisan co-sponsorship in both houses. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.