

Senate Transportation Committee

Vivian Hall 271-3091

SB 39-FN, relative to establishing an alternative driver education program.

Hearing Date: January 28, 2025

Time Opened: 1:04 P.M.

Time Closed: 1:25 PM

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ricciardi, McConkey, Ward, Fenton and Prentiss

Members of the Committee Absent : Senators Ricciardi, McConkey, Ward, Fenton and Prentiss

Bill Analysis: This bill establishes an alternative driver education program and authorizes the commissioner of safety to develop and adopt rules for said purpose.

Sponsors:

Sen. Lang

Sen. Ward

Sen. Murphy

Sen. Innis

Sen. Reardon

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Sullivan

Rep. Osborne

Rep. Edwards

Rep. Moffett

Rep. J. Aron

Rep. Coker

Who supports the bill: Senator Howard Pearl, Jesse Medeiros, Curtis Howland

Who opposes the bill: Town Councilor Curtis Register, Dan Goodman (AAA), Michael Doucette, Director of New Hampshire Driver's Ed and Teachers Association, Sharon Cameron NH DETA

Who is neutral on the bill: John Marasco, Director of DMV and Sam Bisson, Driver Education Coordinator for New Hampshire

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Timothy Lang, District 2

- Senator Lang has introduced this bill in the hope that waiting times for student drivers would be reduced and would also help families overcome the cost related barriers.
- This bill is identical to last year's except the fiscal note, in which the program would bring in \$7 million.
- Four criteria that outline the alternative program:

- 1) Drivers under 18 must complete 40 hours of practice driving and their parents must attest to the completion of practice driving.
 - 2) Those under the age of 18 must complete classroom instruction through an online or non-online course given by a public or nonpublic post-secondary school and approved by the Department of Education.
 - 3) Online knowledge-based courses where they must complete the eye and knowledge exam.
 - 4) The alternative program is designed after the successful motorcycle training course and would include a 10-hour class.
- The average cost for the driver's education program is over \$800.
 - Senator Lang expressed concern that the first available date to take a class would be June 3rd. An individual could complete the education program earlier in March, offered in Vermont.
 - New Hampshire citizens need a cost-effective solution for this problem.
 - Senator Prentiss asked if there were other strategies to reduce the wait time. Senator Lang replied that the wait time is going down because of more instructors and they have taken measures to make it more available. The cost is still inaccessible.
 - Senator Ricciardi expressed concern over the tight state budget and asked how many driver's education schools would be available to offer classes. Senator Land replied the bill does not tackle commercial business. They can change their business models or prices to compete with the alternative form of Drivers Ed.
 - Senator Ricciardi asked if this would increase the availability of classes. Senator Lang replied, "yes".
 - Senator Ricciardi asked if the proposed pay scale would be good for attracting applicants. Senator Lang replied that it is anticipated that they would contract these services out to private businesses and that the pay of \$72,000 a year would be attractive.
 - Senator McConkey asked if the current driver's education courses are at "Ma and Pa" shops. Senator Lang replied the cars you see on the road are private business shops. Instructors are required to be in the car with a student for 10 hours while the parent is already required to do 30 hours with student.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Michael Doucette, Head of the Driver's Teachers and Education Committee

- Michael Doucette, head of the Drivers Teachers and Education Committee, cited inaccurate cost estimates and concerns about the state taking over private businesses, which would threaten 65 businesses.
- He questioned the feasibility of the bill, highlighting the need for additional space, longer DMV hours, and the challenge of recruiting instructors.
- Doucette believes the bill sets a bad precedent, pointing out that studies show driver's education leads to safer drivers and argued that a smaller program would eventually grow unsustainable.

Neutral Information Presented:

John Marasco, Director of DMV & Sam Bisson, Driver Education Coordinator for New Hampshire

- Mr. Bisson used to own a drivers' education school and has private experience.
- However, they would not want to take away from the private industry.
- The DMV works with the drivers' education industry to bring down wait times and keep costs from rising. For most places around the state there is not a wait time.
- White Mountain Community College and Employment Security have \$500 scholarships for young people. They give approximately 40-50 scholarships per year.
- There are discussion about starting a pilot program – smaller in nature, for people who have a financial need.
- Senator Ricciardi asked if this would reduce the fiscal note. Director Marasco said this would greatly reduce the fiscal note.
- Senator McConkey asked what the average wait time is. Director Marasco said they were not sure and are working on it.
- Senator Prentiss asked how long the motorcycle program has been in place. Director Marasco stated approximately 20 years.
- Senator Prentiss asked if there would be a workforce challenge. How would the program get developed? Is there a concern about recruiting a large workforce with competitive pay? Director Morasco said it would take time to hire but, the smaller scope would make it easier to both hire and organize. They have doubled the number of part-time employees compared to two and a half years ago.
- Senator Prentiss asked about the logic of turning 18 and not being required to take Driver's Education. Director Morasco answered that state law requires Driver's Ed for those under 18, but not for those 18 or older. While taking Driver's Ed can improve driving skills, it may not be financially worthwhile. Those who do take driver's education tend to perform better on the driving test. Mr. Bisson spoke about the fiscal note. Trainers realistically work 35 hours per week for 47 weeks. Maintenance costs were estimated on the conservative side.