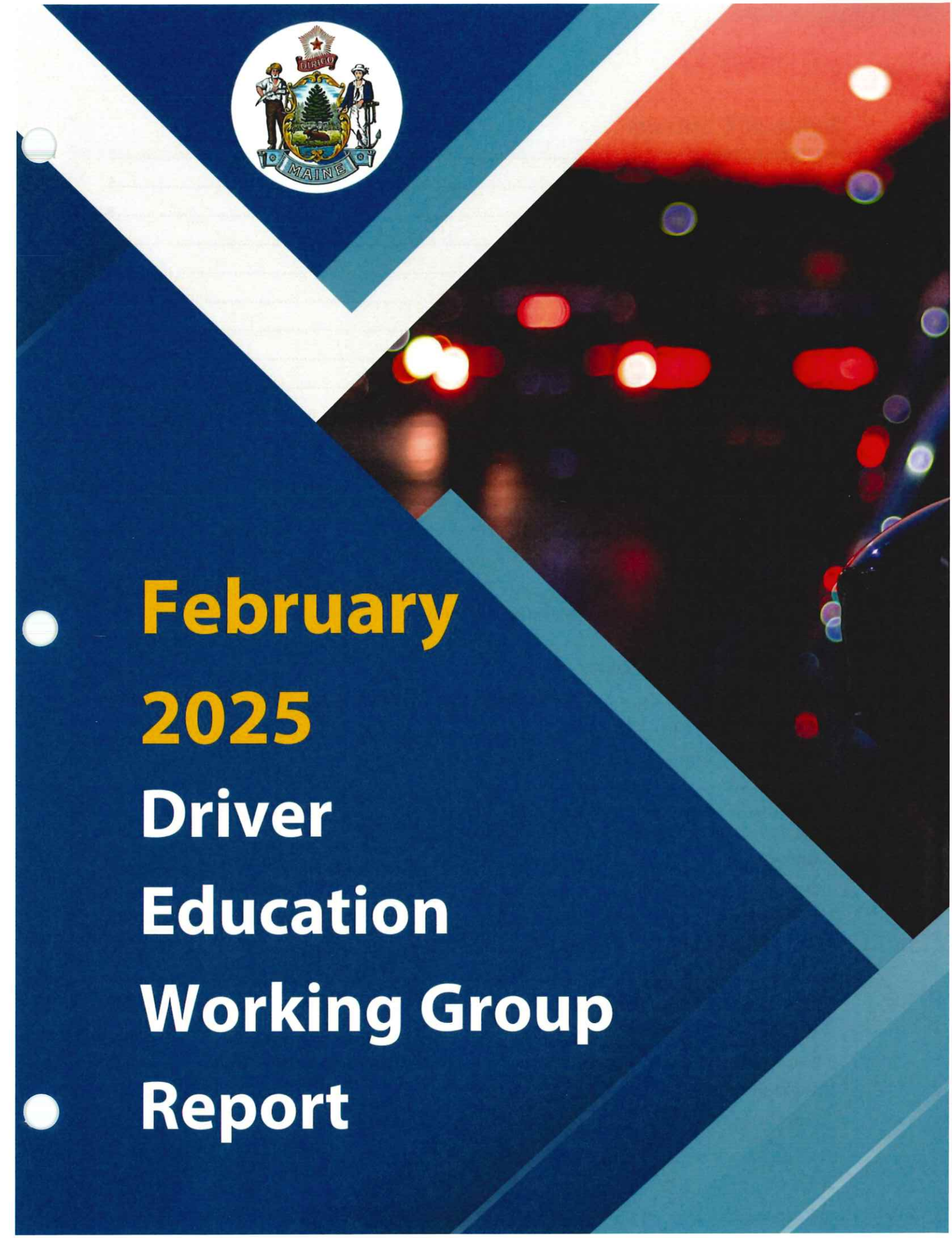

February 2025 Driver Education Working Group Report

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INTRODUCTION

Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for young people in Maine.

While only representing a small percentage of licensed drivers, young drivers in Maine are involved in a significantly higher percentage of crashes, contributing to a high crash rate per capita for this age group.

Common factors contributing to young driver crashes include speeding, distracted driving, driving under the influence and lack of experience.

Driver education plays a crucial role in ensuring that new drivers receive the education and training needed to understand the implications of these common contributing factors.

Driver education teaches drivers about:

- The rules of the road,
- Various road signage,
- Basic road safety,
- Defensive driving and
- How to handle different driving scenarios including:
    - Inclement weather,
    - Freeway driving and
    - What to do when in an emergency.

This early and basic knowledge and training can instill a sense of responsibility and confidence when operating a vehicle.

It helps inexperienced drivers understand the role they play in the safety of themselves, their passengers and other road users.

Ultimately this helps to reduce the number of crashes, fatalities and serious injuries making the road safer for everyone.

Unfortunately, driver education is expensive and not easily accessible for all young drivers in Maine.

Cost is not the sole barrier, however, because the rural nature of Maine coupled with the private school model makes it difficult for all young drivers to get to and from their school.

This is exacerbated if parents or caregivers are unable to transport due to work, other family commitments or a lack of reliable transportation.

"Young drivers are the **riskiest age group on the road**, and the reasons are straightforward – **immaturity and inexperience**," said GHSA Senior Director of External Engagement Pam Shadel Fischer, a national teen driver safety expert.

"The **brain isn't fully developed** until the early to mid-twenties, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which controls **risk assessment and decision-making**.

Many young drivers simply **don't have the behind-the-wheel experience** to recognize risk and take the appropriate corrective action to prevent a crash."

AAA Newsroom Article written by Andrew Gross titled "Back to (Driving) School: More Crashes and Convictions for Teens that Skip Driver Ed". (Appendix F-4)

As a result, many young people, especially in underserved or low-income families, skip this critical education and training and wait until they reach the age where a driver education course is not needed to obtain their license.

The result of this is the directing and convening of a Driver Education Working Group to evaluate these hardships to underserved and low-income populations.

This report delves into these factors and much more.

Research confirms the value of driver education and training in reducing young driver crash risk. But more must be done to ensure the training our highest-risk drivers receive meets their needs.

GHSA recommends **states improve their driver education and training** programs incrementally.

Raising the bar also means ensuring that **driver education and training are available to all** – regardless of race, gender, language, age and any other characteristic. (Appendix F-2)

BACKGROUND

April 6, 2023, Representative Tiffany Roberts, representing House District 149, presented LD 1200 "A Resolve, to Convene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate the Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-Income Families" to the Committee on Transportation.

She testified that the resolve directs the Department of the Secretary of State, Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) to convene a working group to study potential solutions regarding the cost of and access to driver education for underserved populations and low-income families in Maine.

She explained a constituent brought the issue to her as that the cost of driver education is close to $600.

It was imperative, she continued, that driver education should be more accessible, especially for low income and underserved families.

Representative Roberts described that a driver's license opens the doors to the workforce, and we need young people engaged in our economy.

She proposed this working group to consider the issues and potential solutions.

The bill was passed with one amendment and became Chapter 94. It convened the working group, listed the voting members of the group, and required them to report back their findings and recommendations to the Transportation Committee by December 6, 2023.

The working group met 3 times in the summer and fall of 2023.

The group's full roster of membership is listed in Appendix D.

Group membership consists of:

- A Representative and Senator with membership on the Transportation Committee.
- The Secretary of State
- The Deputy Secretary of State for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles
- BMV Staff
- Maine State Police
- Bureau of Highway Safety
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Education
- Department of Labor
- Catherine Cutler Institute USM
- Presque Isle High School Driving School
- Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition
- AK Health
- Social Services

In early 2024 a letter was sent to the Transportation Committee, which can be found in Appendix B.

It explained the progress the group had made and that they had identified three major issues they were considering.

Issue One

How to sustainably fund driver education for underserved populations and low-income families.

The working group has learned that other states have approached this in a number of ways – through a recurring appropriation from their state's transportation budget and using funds collected from motor vehicle fees.

Similar or alternative funding mechanisms will need to be researched in depth.

Issue Two

How to equitably determine program eligibility.

For example, in Wisconsin any student who is part of the free and reduced lunch federal program is eligible for a free driver education course. Other states have programs narrowly tailored for just foster youth.

Ensuring the program is successfully engaging the appropriate group of young people will be essential.

Issue Three

Determining which state agency is in the best position to administer the program.

In some states it was the department of education (DOE), in others it was the department of health and human services (DHHS). Other states had a partnership with motor vehicles and the DOE.

Establishing which state agency, or agencies, is/are properly suited to run the program and how they will do so is critical to the success of any program.

"Financial barriers that may prevent some teens from enrolling in driver education and training also must be addressed.

"As discussed previously, young drivers who complete mandatory driver education do better than their non-trained counterparts.

"But the cost associated with this training – particularly in states where it's only available through private, for-profit schools – can be prohibitive.

"As a result, some teens must wait until they're 18 to get a driver's license and that means they're not realizing the benefits of [a Graduated Driver License] GDL." (Appendix F-2)

The group explained to the committee that given the size of the issues as well as the current limited timeframe, additional time was needed to build upon the work that has already been completed.

They also recommended the working group be expanded by adding a representative from the Department of Labor (DOL).

Since workforce development is intrinsically tied to access to transportation, DOL would bring valuable perspective and data to the issue of driver education access.

The Committee and Legislature agreed to grant more time to the group and passed **Chapter 595 (LD 2281) "Resolve to Reconvene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families."** found in Appendix C.

This required that no later than February 3, 2025, the working group shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations for presentation to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over transportation matters.

The Resolve stated the committee is authorized to submit legislation related to the report to the 132nd Legislature in 2025.

The working group held monthly meetings through January 2025.

During this period they gained a thorough understanding of the issues raised, the challenges to accessing driver education, the benefits of driver education and the methods other states are using to address similar issues and formed recommendations and a path forward as described in this report.

Although vehicle crashes remain **the leading cause of death for teens**, fewer new drivers are participating in what used to be considered a rite of passage – driver education.

State funding and requirements for these programs have declined over recent decades, leaving **uneducated teen drivers vulnerable on America's roads**.

New research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reveals that teens that skip this important step are involved in more crashes and receive more traffic convictions compared to their peers that participated in driver education.

"This research confirms what conventional wisdom tells us – **driver education makes a difference**," said Dr. William Van Tassel, AAA manager of Driver Training Programs.

"Despite recent declines in participation, **the overwhelming majority of Americans believe** new drivers should take part in this critical step of the learning-to-drive process." (Appendix F-1)

CONSIDERATION OF RELEVANT DATA

School Year (when students are 16)	School Enrollment	Obtained License	
2019-2020 (b. 2003)	13,746	12,502	License w/ DE
		4,972	License w/o DE
		17,474	Total
2020-2021 (b. 2004)	13,697	12,629	License w/ DE
		3,849	License w/o DE
		16,478	Total
2021-2022 (b. 2005)	13,914	12,761	License w/ DE
		2,974	License w/o DE
		15,735	Total
School Year (when students are 16)	**School Enrollment**	**Completed Driver's Education**	
2019-2020 (b. 2003)	13,746	12,502	DE w/ license
		1,131	DE w/o license
		13,633	Total
2020-2021 (b. 2004)	13,697	12,629	DE w/ license
		1,267	DE w/o license
		13,896	Total
2021-2022 (b. 2005)	13,914	12,761	DE w/ license
		1,619	DE w/o license
		14,380	Total

Figure 1-1: Number of students enrolled with the Department of Education and lists those with driver's licenses who completed driver education and those with driver's licenses who did not complete driver education.

The greater number of students listed are those who completed driver education and now hold a driver's license.

We are thankful that those teens received the extremely important education related to driving prior to earning their permit and operating on the public roads that we share with them.

But those who chose not to complete driver education, for various reasons including its cost, are of great concern considering those students did not receive the required knowledge related to the safe operation of a motor vehicle.

They are missing key points such as driving when:

- Distracted,
- Under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol,
- Tired or fatigued,
- Emotions are running high and
- Other teens are in the vehicle.

This information is extremely important to the safety of teenagers and others as they learn to operate a vehicle safely.

Being able to assist this age group with their completion of driver education would create a safer environment for teenagers and others as the former operates a motor vehicle.

DRIVERS UNDER 21	2002	2021	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Alabama	6.81	4.79	-2.02	-29.6%
Alaska	4.50	2.57	-1.93	-42.8%
Arizona	9.76	5.45	-4.31	-44.2%
Arkansas	8.45	6.44	-2.00	-23.7%
California	6.03	4.12	-1.91	-31.6%
Colorado	6.47	4.31	-2.16	-33.4%
Connecticut	4.97	2.70	-2.27	-45.7%
Delaware	7.24	4.73	-2.51	-34.7%
D.C.	6.10	17.17	11.07	181.4%
Florida	7.70	6.85	-0.85	-11.0%
Georgia	6.51	4.93	-1.59	-24.4%
Hawaii	3.91	3.42	-0.50	-12.7%
Idaho	6.57	3.83	-2.74	-41.7%
Illinois	4.68	3.33	-1.35	-28.8%
Indiana	4.89	4.45	-0.44	-8.9%
Iowa	4.61	2.37	-2.24	-48.6%
Kansas	6.65	3.43	-3.22	-48.4%
Kentucky	10.55	9.66	-0.89	-8.4%
Louisiana	10.25	6.96	-3.30	-32.2%
Maine	6.14	2.65	-3.49	-56.9%
Maryland	5.44	2.89	-2.55	-46.9%
Massachusetts	3.59	1.99	-1.59	-44.4%
Michigan	5.43	3.17	-2.26	-41.7%
Minnesota	5.76	1.66	-4.10	-71.2%
Mississippi	9.06	9.13	0.07	0.8%
Missouri	8.76	5.04	-3.72	-42.5%
Montana	6.75	7.70	0.94	14.0%

Figure 1-2: Fatal crash involvement rates per 10,000 licensed drivers under 21 (Appendix F-2).

DRIVERS UNDER 21	2002	2021	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Nebraska	5.48	2.93	-2.55	-46.5%
Nevada	7.56	3.82	-3.74	-49.5%
New Hampshire	2.43	1.76	-0.66	-27.3%
New Jersey	4.14	2.36	-1.78	-42.9%
New Mexico	9.49	9.18	-0.31	-3.3%
New York	4.86	3.63	-1.23	-25.2%
North Carolina	9.18	5.96	-3.22	-35.1%
North Dakota	3.53	5.63	2.10	59.7%
Ohio	5.39	3.33	-2.06	-38.2%
Oklahoma	7.40	4.69	-2.71	-36.7%
Oregon	4.38	2.95	-1.43	-32.7%
Pennsylvania	6.81	2.86	-3.94	-57.9%
Rhode Island	5.52	2.39	-3.13	-56.7%
South Carolina	7.36	5.18	-2.18	-29.7%
South Dakota	7.99	3.01	-4.97	-62.3%
Tennessee	8.73	5.79	-2.94	-33.7%
Texas	7.94	5.20	-2.74	-34.5%
Utah	3.85	2.65	-1.21	-31.4%
Vermont	4.96	4.35	-0.62	-12.5%
Virginia	6.14	3.87	-2.27	-37.0%
Washington	4.50	2.95	-1.55	-34.5%
West Virginia	9.90	2.81	-7.09	-71.6%
Wisconsin	7.01	3.57	-3.44	-49.1%
Wyoming	12.04	4.69	-7.34	-61.0%
National	**6.48**	**4.27**	**-2.21**	**-34.1%**

Figure 1-3: Fatal crash involvement rates per 10,000 licensed drivers under 21 continued (Appendix F-2).

More widely available driver education is in the best interest of driver and traffic safety in Maine.

2021-2024
Driver Education Student Count

Number of students who completed driver education to obtain a Maine Permit.

Figure 1-4: The number of students who completed driver education in the past four years, 2021-2024.

The fluctuation in student count is due to the COVID-19 business closure in 2020.

The student count is slowly returning to pre-COVID numbers. That being akin to 12,888 students in 2019 specifically.

The BMV licenses 66 driver education school locations with a total of 133 driver education locations in Maine.

The BMV also licenses 263 driver education instructors to provide the instruction to teenagers.

The schools can provide instruction in the traditional classroom setting, a blended course using a virtual platform such as Zoom combined with the traditional classroom and a blended course using the online AAA "How to Drive" course combined with traditional classroom instruction.

These options allow the driver education schools to provide instruction to our teens without the need for multiple store fronts that can raise the price of driver education.

Business and vehicle insurance as well as rent and gas prices have caused the cost of driver education to increase over the past few years making it difficult for some teenagers and their families to afford driver education.

The wages needed to attract and employ driver education instructors has also risen significantly.

It would offer the ability to complete this course and obtain the education needed for teenagers to operate safely on our roadways.

It would also provide the ability for these individuals to work, get to school and help their families.

The study found that drivers who were licensed at age 18, making them exempt from comprehensive licensing requirements, **had the highest crash rates in the first year of licensure** of all those licensed under the age of 25.

Compared with drivers licensed at age 18, those licensed at age 16 had **27% lower crash rates** over the first two months of licensure and **14% lower crash rates** over the first 12 months of licensure.

Compared with drivers licensed at 18, those licensed at age 17 had **19% lower crash rates** over the first 2 months of licensure and **6% lower crash rates** over the first 12 months of licensure.

In addition, 16-year-old license applicants performed best of all those licensed under age 25 on the on-road license examination, with a **22% failure rate** compared with a **37% failure rate** at age 18. (Appendix F-3)

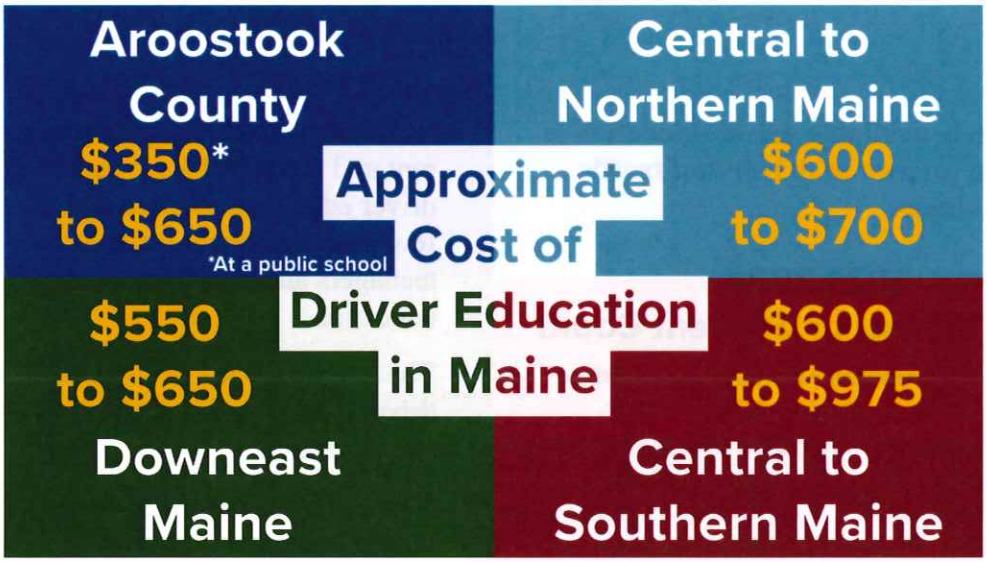

Figure 1-5: The approximate cost of Driver Education in Maine by area.

Aroostook County covers: Ashland, Caribou, Easton, Fort Kent, Houlton, Limestone, Mars Hill and Presque Isle.

Central to Northern Maine covers: Augusta, Bangor, Bar Harbor, Belfast, Blue Hill, Brewer, Buckfield, Bucksport, Dexter, Dixfield, Dover Foxcroft, East Millinocket, Ellsworth, Farmington, Fryeburg, Greenville, Guilford, Hermon, Hudson, Madison, Newport, North Anson, Oakland, Old Town, Orrington, Palmyra, Readfield, Rockland, Rockport, Skowhegan, South China, South Paris, Strong, Sullivan, Thorndike, Unity, Waldoboro and Waterville.

Central to Southern Maine covers: Auburn, Augusta, Bath, Brunswick, Cape Elizabeth, Cornish, Cumberland, Falmouth, Freeport, Gardiner, Gorham, Gray, Kennebunk, Kittery, Lewiston, Lisbon, Livermore Falls, Naples, Portland, Saco, Sanford, Scarborough, South Portland, Standish, Topsham, Wales, Waterboro, Westbrook, Windham, Wiscasset, Yarmouth and York.

Downeast Maine covers: Baileyville, Cherryfield, East Machias, Harrington, Lincoln and Machias.

Individuals in Maine on SNAP and TANF aged 15-17 years old.

15	16	17	Total
SNAP 2,849	SNAP 2,768	SNAP 2,581	SNAP 8,198
TANF 429	TANF 395	TANF 355	TANF* 1,179

*Most people in the TANF program are also in the SNAP program.

Figure 1-6: Individuals in Maine on SNAP and TANF benefits aged 15 to 17 years old as if January 3, 2025.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

As explained in the **Background Section** of this report, the working group was made up a diverse group of stakeholders who are experts in several fields relevant to this topic.

To reiterate, this includes:

- Public policy,
- Roadway safety,
- Program management,
- Social services and
- Driver education.

However, the working group members wanted to hear from other stakeholders as well. These individuals were invited to provide presentations to the group and to join meetings to provide input.

The working group met with representatives from the Wisconsin Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Washington Department of Licensing, several driver education school owners, the Quality Housing Association and the Penobscot Nation.

The stakeholders provided valuable insight and input, explained current laws, provided relevant data, helped the working group understand their business models and answered questions.

The stakeholder outreach provided the working group a number of opportunities to understand the issues at hand from many different perspectives.

OUTREACH TO OTHER STATES

Understanding that the issues of access and affordability are not unique problems to Maine, the working group looked to other states who have worked to pass and/or implement related solutions.

Some of those who engaged with the working group, like **Wisconsin**, had successful initiatives to share.

Others, like **Iowa**, have had a program in place since the 1990s to bolster access to driver education programs for low-income families.

Some states had failed initiatives but are looking to reintroduce refined proposals. Below is a synopsis of what the working group learned.

Georgia

The state's GDL law, known as the Teenage and Adult Driver Responsibility Act (TADRA), requires young drivers 15-18 years old to complete driver education through one of four methods.

Independent research conducted for the state found that teens who completed method one, which includes 30 hours of classroom instruction, six hours of professionally instructed behind-the-wheel training and 50 hours of supervised driving with a parent or guardian, had better and safer outcomes in comparison to the other methods.

These young drivers had fewer crashes and crashes resulting in serious injuries or fatalities compared to their teen counterparts who completed the driver education training requirement using one of the other methods (Strategic Research Group, 2021)." (Appendix F-2)

Iowa

Since the 1990's, the state of Iowa has **statutorily required that all school districts** either offer a driver education program or connect students with related resources.

It is written into the statute that if the school directly offers a program, it must be on Saturday during the summer or after school.

It also requires the DOE to pay for the course if that student qualifies for free or reduced lunch.

The program is administered by the DOE, but their Department of Transportation (DOT) oversees it because they are the entity that administers licenses in the state.

Iowa also allows for **parent-taught driver education**. Prior to the pandemic, this was only available to home schooled students.

Since then, it has remained more widely accessible as long as a parent becomes a certified driver education instructor, which in turn **increases the number of driving hours from 12 to 30 hours.**

Michigan

Michigan looked at but was not successful in passing a bill that proposed two models.

The first was a peer grant program that **private driver education schools that elect to be a part of the program would be made available to eligible students**.

Under this model, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) would provide payment to the driver's education school enrolled in the program.

The second model looked at **putting driver's education programs back into school districts**.

The bill would have looked to certified existing teachers as driver education instructors and pay them for their time.

This model would have also looked to local car dealerships to partner with to provide vehicles.

The estimated costs of this proposal, which did not receive funding from Michigan's legislature, was roughly $30 million for need based students.

Minnesota

Minnesota recently considered a proposal that would **direct schools to enroll students in a driver's education course** either through the school or a provider.

The initiative included a provision that would reimburse the schools based on a tiered system:

- $300 for each student who qualifies for free lunch,
- $200 for each student who qualifies for reduced-price lunch and
- $100 for any other student.

The driver education program may have also charged a fee to the student for the remaining cost of the program.

It was estimated that the cost of this proposal would be around $4.8 million from the state's General Fund. This bill died but is expected to be reintroduced.

Mississippi

In the last year, Mississippi enacted a law that **requires public high schools** to offer a driver education course to include classroom instruction and behind-the-wheel instruction beginning with in the **2026-2027 school year**.

This newly established statute will be implemented and administered by the state's DOE.

Currently the cost of the program is unknown, however the State Superintendent of Education and the Commissioner of Public Safety are required to prepare an estimated budget report of the related costs and provide an update to the legislature **by July 1, 2025**.

Nebraska

Teens that completed driver education revealed similar findings that included not only **lower crash and violation rates** compared to their peers who did not complete formal training, but also **reductions in convictions involving alcohol** during the first two years of licensure (Shell et at., 2015) (Appendix F-2)

Ohio

An analysis was conducted of crash data for 130,000 drivers 16-24 years old in the year after they obtained a driver's license.

Researchers found that compared with drivers licensed at 18, those licensed at **16 had a 27% lower crash rate in their first two months of licensure and a 14% lower rate in the first year**.

Looking at the same timeframes for 17-year-olds **the rates were 19% and 6% lower, respectively, when compared to drivers licensed at 18**.

In addition, the study found **that among drivers under 25, 16-year-olds were the most successful** during their on-road license examination.

Their failure rate was 22% compared to 37% for 18-year-olds. (Appendix F-2)

Oregon

Teens who completed a DOT approved driver education course had **fewer crashes, convictions and suspensions** compared to their peers who did not (Raymond et al., 2007).

Drivers and Traffic Fatalities: 20 Years of Progress on the Road to Zero." (Appendix F-2)

Wisconsin

In the last year, Wisconsin enacted a new law that **established a grant program for people** under the age of 20 who are or would be eligible for free or reduced lunch in the federal school lunch program and are enrolled in a public, choice, charter or home school.

The program received an initial $6 million appropriation from the state's Transportation Fund, and is administered by Wisconsin's Department of Transportation (WisDOT) which includes the DMV.

WISCONSIN MODEL

In November 2024 Tommy Winkler, Administrator of the DMV, from WisDOT presented to Maine's working group its pilot program.

This pilot program stemmed directly from the legislation that was passed in December 2023 granting the state $6 million dollars to implement the program.

This funding came from their Transportation Fund. **Wisconsin launched their pilot in early September 2024**.

To meet the qualifications, eligible students must:

- Be aged between 14.5 to 19 years old,
- Not carry a current/previous Driver's License and
- Not have any suspensions/revocations on DOT's profile.

Using an electronic platform **students were able to apply for financial support directly**. They received notice within 7-10 business days regarding whether their application was approved.

Support has been given out on a first-come first-served basis until their funds are depleted.

Upon approval students received an email containing two coupon codes. One is for classroom instruction; the other is for behind the wheel training that the student provides directly to their choice of an approved Driving School for direct reimbursement.

Students have nine months to use their coupons before it expires.

If a coupon expires the student may re-apply for the program.

Here the Reimbursement Plan's details are laid out for examination.

The plan does the following:

- Disburses funds via check or Automated Clearing House (ACH).
- Has approved driving schools submit for reimbursement using Wisconsin's existing internal electronic platform, "Peoplesoft".
- Has the ability to provide coupons and enter them into the system prior to a student taking their driver education class.
- Provides reimbursements that are generated daily with payment being completed within 1-2 business days after data is entered into their Driver Educate Completion system.
- Makes sure that students who pay for the full portion of the school do not get reimbursed directly; reimbursements only go to approved driving schools.

Current Data

At the time of the presentation in November 2024, the state of Wisconsin **was only two months into their pilot program and had already approved 10,000 applications for students**.

At that point in time, they were no longer accepting new applications **due to the program's popularity**.

During this short duration:

- Out of the **20,000** coupons that had been generated **5,444** had been redeemed,
- Of the **147** approved driving schools **77** had already been receiving reimbursements through redeemed coupons, resulting in more than **$1.5 million** distributed back to the driving schools,
- Feedback from the driving schools has been positive, and they have found the reimbursement process easy to navigate and
- Parents of students have had a positive response to the program and have been excited about it.

Limitations and Considerations for Application in Maine

While this program has seen a success in Wisconsin, it is important that specific circumstances and details be discussed in any serious consideration of implementing this application in Maine.

We must keep in mind that in Wisconsin:

- There is currently no audit plan in place to determine whether the funds are being used appropriately; their goal is to audit both the students, and the driver training schools,
- Currently they are working to develop GIS maps to better understand data and statistical information,
- It is unclear if they will receive additional funding once their $6 million is depleted,
- If a student's coupon expires, it is unclear if that money will be "held" for the student to reapply to the program, or be released back into the general funds,
- They expected to help 7,500 students and have already approved 10,000 students,
- At the time of the presentation adequate evaluation of the program's effectiveness had not been conducted,
- Eligibility for the program is currently reliant on self-reporting by the student and
- Reimbursement to the schools is not contingent upon the student completing their Driver Education requirements.
    - **However**, Wisconsin noted that each student can only receive one grant so they expect/hope that serves as a motivator for the student to complete the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group believes it is in the best interest of the State of Maine **for highway safety purposes and economic growth** to provide driver education to teens in high school who do not have the means to pay for this valuable training and life skill.

To achieve this goal, which is beneficial to all of society, **the working group makes the following recommendations** to establish a program to pay for driver education for certain students to the Maine Legislature and specifically to the committee with oversight on transportation matters.

1. **Lead state agency:** The BMV is positioned to oversee this proposed program as it aligns well with the agency's strategic goal to contribute to roadway safety.
2. **Program plan:** Use the successful Wisconsin model with certain modifications to fit Maine's needs. Include specific eligibility criteria, an audit component and reporting capabilities.
3. **Sustainability:** Ensure there is ongoing funding available for the state to fully benefit from the program.
    a. The Maine DOL administers programs through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Vocational Rehabilitation that may also be able to pay for driver education. Individuals interested in learning more about those options should contact their local CareerCenter.
4. **Eligibility criteria:** The applicant must be 15 to 17, never held a driver's license and is eligible for at least one of the following programs:
    a. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),
    b. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
    c. National School Lunch Program (NSLP),
    d. Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) or in foster care and
    e. The applicant must not be receiving funds for driver education from the DOL, or through the DHHS Aspire or Hope programs.
5. **Modernized application process:** An online computer program will be used to create an efficient and easy application process. The system will also provide a streamlined application review and approval process, a payment system and audit and reporting functionality.
6. **Application approval:** The application will be reviewed, verified and approved by BMV program staff. If denied there will be an appeal process in place for applicants to allow the BMV to consider mitigating factors.
7. **Payments to Driver Education Schools**: A school will only be reimbursed for the standard fee charged for students in the class. They will receive two-thirds of the payment when a student begins a class, and the remaining one-third upon completion.
8. **Administrative Rules:** The BMV will adopt routine technical rules to include but are not limited to, the program description, the eligibility criteria, the application process and the process for paying driver education schools.
9. **Annual report:** The BMV will provide the Transportation Committee with an annual report to allow for the review of the effectiveness of the program.

ESTIMATED PROGRAM COSTS

With very few public transportation options, **Maine residents depend heavily on the ability to drive** to work, receive medical care, attend a trade school or college and to participate in society.

Without public transportation or a driver's license a person's ability to pursue higher education or to earn a living is very limited.

Without an education or employment a person becomes reliant on state and federal assistance programs to help meet their basic needs.

A driver's license is vital in Maine to unlocking access to employment, education, healthcare and making contributions to society.

The key to driver safety is the ability to obtain driver education where a student learns motor vehicle laws and the safe way to maneuver a vehicle under numerous circumstances.

This includes traffic situations, roadway structure and weather conditions.

The working group advises that **$1 million annually** could fund driver education for approximately **1,150 students**.

These funds should be allocated to a non-lapsing **special Driver Education Fund** to only be used for the program.

The working group was originally created not simply with an eye toward increased access and fairness, but also as an acknowledgement as to the benefits of crash prevention.

A public investment in driver education is an investment in safer roads, higher employment and a better educated workforce.

The ripple effects will not show up in a fiscal note without dynamic budgeting, but they would positively impact both state dollars and family budgets.

Having a better trained driving public will likely result in fewer:

- Crashes,
- Missed work hours,
- Missed appointments,
- Costly interactions with insurance companies,
- Repair expenses,
- Demands on first responders,
- Incidents of crash-related damage to expensive state and local infrastructure,
- Interactions with the health care system, and
- Negative incidents at large.

The group additionally believes that **the reduction of these events will lead to a general increase in productivity**.

A team of researchers led by the Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CIRP) at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) found that new **drivers licensed before age 18 who are subject to mandatory driver education**, including behind-the-wheel training and Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) restrictions, were **less likely to crash** than drivers licensed at age 18 who are exempt from these requirements.

These findings were published online by the journal JAMA Network Open and suggest that comprehensive requirements for licensing can keep novice drivers safe. (Appendix F-3)

CONCLUSION

The working group believes the recommendations in this report will increase access to driver education for young people who cannot afford it.

In a state with so little public transportation the ability to drive safely is an essential life skill.

An investment in driver education is a **commitment to safer roads and the wellbeing of all Mainers**.

Driver education is associated with a lower incidence of both crashes and convictions – **reducing crashes by 4.3 percent and convictions by nearly 40 percent**.

Teens that completed driver education not only scored higher on the driving exam, they also **demonstrated modest increases in knowledge over their peers who did not take any formal training**. (Appendix F-1)

It is also an investment in a more skilled workforce that will open doors to higher employment and improve prosperity throughout the state.

The recommended legislation in this report would create a program similar to one that has proven to be very popular in Wisconsin.

It will provide access to driver education for approximately **1,100 students annually**.

We know the need is greater with approximately 5,000 students annually waiting until they are 18 years old to apply for a license without formal driver education.

However, we cannot be sure they all delay taking driver education due to the cost. It may be due to non-financial factors. The program will provide an opportunity to begin meeting the needs of the students who lack the resources to pay for driver education.

The recommended legislation also includes an annual reporting requirement that will give the Transportation Committee the ability to monitor the success of the program and address any challenges identified.

The program also aligns well with the mission of the BMV and their four strategic priorities:

- Improving the customer experience,
- Improving the employee experience,
- Utilizing trusted technologies, and
- Contributing to roadway safety.

The Bureau believes it is well positioned to accomplish the proposed program objectives.

The working group thanks the Transportation Committee for providing the opportunity for interested parties and stakeholders to study the issues outlined in this report.

The working group is grateful to be given the chance to provide a well-thought-out solution that will have **positive ripple effects across Maine**.

"Overall, the findings suggest that **driver education can make a difference**, but there is still much room for improvement in most existing programs," noted Peter Kissinger, President and CEO of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. (Appendix F-1)

DRAFT LEGISLATION

(Requires refinement by OPLA before it is finalized.)

29A §1351-A Driver Education Cost Reimbursement Program is enacted to read:

1. **Driver Education Cost Reimbursement Program.** The Secretary of State shall establish a Driver Education Cost Reimbursement program to provide funding for students in underserved populations and low-income families to complete driver education as required in 29A MRSA §1351, sub §1. The allocated funds will be to a non-lapsing, special fund to be used only for this program.
2. **Rules.** The Bureau of Motor Vehicles shall adopt routine technical rules to include, but are not limited to, the program description, the eligibility criteria, the application process, an appeal process, the process for reimbursing driver education schools, and audit requirements.
3. **Annual report.** The Bureau of Motor Vehicles will provide the committee with oversight on transportation matters an annual program summary report.

Effective Date. This section is effective January 1, 2027

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

2024 - Chapter 595 (LD 2281) - "Resolve to Reconvene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families"

APPROVED	CHAPTER
JULY 7, 2023	94
BY GOVERNOR	RESOLVES

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-THREE

H.P. 760 - L.D. 1200

Resolve, to Convene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families

Preamble. Whereas, for persons who have not attained 20 years of age, taking a driver education course and achieving the required number of driving hours is necessary in order to obtain a driver's license; and

Whereas, the cost of taking a driver education course is a financial hardship for many families; and

Whereas, families living in rural areas have a more difficult time gaining access to driver education courses; and

Whereas, youth and families also face many other obstacles when trying to comply with the legal requirements to obtain a driver's license; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Working group. Resolved: That the Department of the Secretary of State, Bureau of Motor Vehicles shall convene a working group to study potential solutions regarding the cost of and access to driver education for underserved populations and low-income families.

Sec. 2. Working group membership. Resolved: That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the working group membership is as follows:

1. One member of the Senate who serves on the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, appointed by the President of the Senate;

2. One member of the House of Representatives who serves on the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

3. One member representing the driver education school industry, appointed by the Secretary of State;

4. One member representing a State Police traffic division, appointed by the Chief of the State Police;

5. One or more members representing affected groups, including, but not limited to, low-income families, immigrant or refugee communities, tribal communities and foster children, appointed by the Secretary of State;

6. An employee of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles who is responsible for the oversight of driver education, appointed by the Secretary of State;

7. The Commissioner of Education or the commissioner's designee;

8. The Commissioner of Health and Human Services or the commissioner's designee;

9. The Deputy Secretary of State having oversight over the Bureau of Motor Vehicles or the deputy secretary's designee;

10. The Secretary of State or the secretary's designee; and

11. One member representing the Bureau of Highway Safety, appointed by the Commissioner of Public Safety.

Sec. 3. Compensation. Resolved: That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, members of the working group may not be compensated for their work on the working group, but legislative members may receive the legislative per diem.

Sec. 4. Duties. Resolved: That the working group shall:

1. Identify and document the current status of the availability of the State's driver education program;

2. Examine and identify potential methods of providing driver education at a lower cost for underserved populations and low-income families;

3. Identify possible funding mechanisms to pay for part or all of driver education for low-income families; and

4. Make recommendations based on the findings of the working group.

Sec. 5. Staff assistance. Resolved: That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the Department of the Secretary of State, Bureau of Motor Vehicles shall provide necessary staffing services to the working group, and Legislative Council staff support is not authorized.

Sec. 6. Report. Resolved: That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, no later than February 1, 2024, the working group shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations for presentation to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation. The Joint Standing Committee on Transportation is authorized to submit legislation related to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 131st Legislature.

APPENDIX B:

2023 - Chapter 94 (LD 1200)

Department of the Secretary of State
Bureau of Motor Vehicles

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

Catherine Curtis
Deputy Secretary of State

February 1, 2024

The Honorable Ben Chipman, Senate Chair
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

The Honorable Lydia Crafts, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Dear Senator Chipman, Representative Crafts and Members of the Committee,

Chapter 94, Resolve, to Convene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families, directs the Secretary of State to:

1. Identify and document the current status of the availability of the State's driver education program;
2. Examine and identify potential methods of providing driver education at a lower cost for underserved populations and low-income families;
3. Identify possible funding mechanisms to pay for part or all of driver education for low-income families; and
4. Make recommendations based on the findings of the working group.

Time constraints on the working group.

Due to the late adjournment of the Legislature, this resolve did not go into effect until October 25, 2023, and therefore, the group was unable to convene until after that time. While the group has been working efficiently and diligently since the effective date of the resolve, it has become clear that in order to thoughtfully consider and study this important issue, more time is necessary.

The working group has identified three major issues.

However, what we can report back to the committee based on discussions had throughout the three meetings held so far is that there are three major issues that will need to be resolved:

- **How to sustainably fund driver education for underserved populations and low-income families:** The working group has learned that other states have approached this a number of ways – through a recurring appropriation from their state's transportation budget and in using funds collected from motor vehicle fees. Similar or alternative funding mechanisms will need to be researched in depth.

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- **How to equitably determine program eligibility:** For example, in Wisconsin, any student who is part of the free and reduced lunch federal program is eligible for a free driver education course while other states have programs narrowly tailored for just foster youth. Ensuring the program is successfully engaging the appropriate group of young people will be essential.
- **Determining which state agency is in the best position to administer the program:** In some states, it was the department of education, in others it was the department of health and human services, and other states had a partnership of motor vehicles and department of education. Establishing which state agency – or agencies – are properly suited to run the program and how they will do so is critical to the success of any program.

Other issues arose in discussions

In addition to the three major issues discussed above, ancillary issues were also identified. Those included: language access capabilities; figuring out how or whether unaccompanied minors are able to take advantage of the program; the impact on driver education schools in more rural areas; the additional need of ensuring youth are able to achieve the required 70 driving hours; among others.

Recommendations

Given the size of the issues as well as the current limited time frame, we recommend additional time in order to build upon the work that has already been completed. More time will allow the group to recommend a program for the 132nd Legislature that is high quality and realistic. The working group has learned of other states who are also looking into driver education access as well but that have a considerably longer time to meaningfully study the issue. For example, the State of Washington will be publishing their own report in October of this year and, in total, will have spent 15 months researching the issues versus the approximately four months our working group has been allotted. Being able to learn from other states is an important part of the process.

Another recommendation of the working group is to expand membership by adding a representative from the Department of Labor. Since workforce development is intrinsically tied to access to transportation, the Department of Labor would bring valuable perspective and data to the issue of driver education access.

We ask the committee report out a new resolve to extend the work of the working group with the new resolve giving the Transportation Committee in the 132nd Legislature the ability to report out a bill in response to the final recommendations of the working group.

Moreover, to avoid any further delays, we ask the committee to consider passing the new resolve as an emergency, so we may incorporate the new member from DOL and continue our work right away and not wait 90 days after adjournment.

Based on this information, we hope the committee will be supportive of allowing the working group to continue their work through this year and of expanding the working group by one member.

Sincerely,

Shenna Bellows

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

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CHAPTER 94, L.D. 1200
Resolve, to Convene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families

APPOINTMENTS

Named in law to be appointed	Appointee	Appointed by
One member of the Senate who serves on the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation	Senator Tim Nangle – Senate District 26	President Jackson
One member of the House of Representatives who serves on the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation	Rep. Dan Ankeles – House District 100	Speaker Talbot Ross
One member representing a State Police traffic division	Lt. Bruce Scott – Maine State Police, Department of Public Safety	Chief of the State Police
One member representing the Bureau of Highway Safety	Director Lauren Stewart – Director Bureau of Highway Safety	Commissioner of Public Safety
Commissioner of Education or the commissioner's designee	Beth Lambert – Director, Teaching and Learning	DOE
Commissioner of Health and Human Services or the commissioner's designee	Olivia Watson – Policy and Engagement Associate	DHHS
The Secretary of State or the secretary's designee	Joann Bautista – Deputy Secretary of State	SOS
The Deputy Secretary of State having oversight over the Bureau of Motor Vehicles or the deputy secretary's designee	Cathie Curtis – Deputy Secretary of State for BMV	SOS
One member representing the driver education school industry	Aaron Buzza - Presque Isle High School-Driving School MSAD #1 Driver Education Administrator	SOS
One or more members representing affected groups, including, but not limited to, low-income families, immigrant or refugee communities, tribal communities and foster children	Shannon Saxby – Catherine Cutler Institute, University of Southern Maine	SOS
	Tobin Williams – Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition	SOS
	Abdikhadar Shire – AK Health Services	SOS
An employee of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles who is responsible for the oversight of driver education	Beth Kohler – Division of License Services, Bureau of Motor Vehicles	SOS

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APPENDIX C:

Letter to Transportation Committee 2/1/24

APPROVED
APRIL 9, 2024
BY GOVERNOR

CHAPTER
595
PUBLIC LAW

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR

H.P. 1467 - L.D. 2281

An Act to Reconvene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, Resolve 2023, chapter 94 established a working group to study the issue of access to driver education for underserved populations and low-income families; and

Whereas, due to the adjournment date of the First Special Session of the 131st Legislature, the working group had insufficient time to complete its duties; and

Whereas, it is imperative that the working group established by this legislation have ample time to complete its duties; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. Working group. The Department of the Secretary of State, Bureau of Motor Vehicles shall convene a working group to study potential solutions regarding the cost of and access to driver education for underserved populations and low-income families.

Sec. 2. Working group membership. Notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the working group membership is as follows:

1. One member of the Senate who serves on the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, appointed by the President of the Senate;

2. One member of the House of Representatives who serves on the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

3. One member representing the driver education school industry, appointed by the Secretary of State;

4. One member representing a State Police traffic division, appointed by the Chief of the State Police;

5. One or more members representing affected groups, including, but not limited to, low-income families, immigrant or refugee communities, tribal communities and foster children, appointed by the Secretary of State;

6. An employee of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles who is responsible for the oversight of driver education, appointed by the Secretary of State;

7. The Commissioner of Education or the commissioner's designee;

8. The Commissioner of Health and Human Services or the commissioner's designee;

9. The Commissioner of Labor or the commissioner's designee;

10. The Deputy Secretary of State having oversight over the Bureau of Motor Vehicles or the deputy secretary's designee;

11. The Secretary of State or the secretary's designee; and

12. One member representing the Bureau of Highway Safety, appointed by the Commissioner of Public Safety.

To the greatest extent practicable, the appointing authorities shall reappoint the persons they appointed to the working group established pursuant to Resolve 2023, chapter 94.

A legislative member who is not reelected may continue to serve on the working group for the duration of the working group. If a member elects not to continue serving on the working group, a person must be appointed to the working group in the same manner as the vacating member was appointed.

Sec. 3. Compensation. Notwithstanding the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 2 or any provision of law to the contrary, members of the working group may not be compensated for their work on the working group.

Sec. 4. Duties. The working group shall:

1. Identify and document the current status of the availability of the State's driver education program;

2. Examine and identify potential methods of providing driver education at a lower cost for underserved populations and low-income families;

3. Identify possible funding mechanisms to pay for part or all of driver education for low-income families; and

4. Make recommendations based on the findings of the working group.

Sec. 5. Staff assistance. Notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the Department of the Secretary of State, Bureau of Motor Vehicles shall provide necessary staffing services to the working group, and Legislative Council staff support is not authorized.

Sec. 6. Report. Notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, no later than February 3, 2025, the working group shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations for presentation to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over transportation matters. The committee is authorized to submit legislation related to the report to the 132nd Legislature in 2025.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

APPENDIX D:

Overview of relevant DHHS programs

Important Note: These are complex programs with many nuances. The following is a simplified explanation to put these programs in context for this report only and should not be used for any other purposes.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Qualifications:

Families with dependent children living in the home who meet basic income and other requirements may be able to receive TANF benefits (exceptions may apply based on special circumstances).

Qualifications are:

- Residence: Must live in Maine.
- Citizenship: Only U.S. citizens and noncitizens who meet requirements may receive TANF benefits.
- Work requirements: There are certain work requirements in some circumstances.
- Assets: Must have countable assets less than $10,000 (excluding primary vehicle, home and other assets).
- Income: Low or no income.
- Household composition: Must be a household with dependent children living in the home or pregnant.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Qualifications:

Any household meeting basic income and other requirements may be able to receive SNAP benefits. Below are the most common guidelines for qualification (exceptions may apply based on age or special circumstances).

Qualifications are:

- Residence: Must live in Maine.
- Citizenship: only U.S. citizens and noncitizens who meet requirements may receive food benefits.
- Work requirements: household members who are 18 to 59 years old must participate in work registration. In some circumstances, even 16 or 17 year olds need to work register. Some exceptions may apply.
- Assets: A household may be subject to an asset limit.
- Income: Households must have gross income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or Net income below 100% FPL to qualify for SNAP. Money from wages or other payments to household members are income. A household may qualify for deductions from the household's income, such as rent, utilities, child support, and child care costs. If a household includes senior citizens (60 or older) or people with disabilities, you may be able to deduct medical costs.

People currently enrolled in these programs by age:

AGE	SNAP	TANF (safe to assume these are all receiving SNAP also)
15	2849	429
16	2768	395
17	2581	355

Total 8,198 + 1,179 = 9,377

HOPE Program

Helps Maine parents enroll in and complete training and education beyond high school by providing financial support for costs related to training and education.

ASPIRE Program

Helps TANF recipients move towards financial independence through case management, job training, support, and employment services.

APPENDIX E:

Roster

Voting Members:

Name and Organization	Organization
Senator Tim Nangle	Senate District 26
Representative Dan Ankeles	House District 100
Shenna Bellows	Secretary of State
Cathie Curtis	Bureau of Motor Vehicles
Beth Kohler	Bureau of Motor Vehicles
Aaron Buzza	Presque Isle High School Driving School
Shannon Saxby	Catherine Cutler Institute, USM
Ruben Torres	Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition
Libby Stone-Sterling	Department of Labor
Lt. Bruce Scott	Maine State Police, Department of Public Safety
Olivia Watson	Department of Health and Human Services
Abdikadar Shire	AK Health Services
Beth Lambert	Department of Education
Lauren Stewart	Department of Public Safety

Guests - non-voting members:

Name	Organization
Joann Bautista*	Maine Department of the Secretary of State
AJ Joy	Dirigo Driving Academy
Concepta Jones	Greater Penbay Driving Academy
Anthony Vine	Indie Driver Educational Services LLC
Nelson Bartley	Bartley's Driving School
Dulcey Laberge	Office of Child and Family Services
Peace Mutesi	Quality Housing Coalition
Rod Mahoua	Quality Housing Coalition
Michael Augustine	Penobscot Nation

APPENDIX F:

Linked Sources

1. **Back to (Driving) School: More Crashes and Convictions for Teens that Skip Driver Ed**: newsroom.aaa.com/2014/09/back-driving-school-crashes-convictions-teens-skip-driver-ed/
2. **GHSA Spotlight Report Young Drivers and Traffic Fatalities: 20 Years of Progress on the Road to Zero**: ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/GHSA%20Spotlight%20Report%20-%20Young%20Drivers%20and%20Traffic%20Fatalities%2010.18.23.pdf
3. **Study Suggests Policy, Education and Training Make Youngest Novice Drivers Better Prepared for License Exam, Less Likely to Crash**: chop.edu/news/study-suggests-policy-education-and-training-make-youngest-novice-drivers-better-prepared
4. **Young Driver Fatal Crashes Fall 38% Since 2002 News Release**: ghsa.org/resources/news-releases/young-drivers-safety-report23