

SUBJECT: Increasing behind-the-wheel instruction hours required for driver training

COMMITTEE: Licensing and Administrative Procedures — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — S. Thompson, Darby, Fierro, Geren, Guillen, Huberty

2 nays — Ellzey, Goldman

3 absent — Kuempel, Hernandez, Pacheco

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Anne O’Ryan, AAA Texas; and 13 individuals)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Steve Bruno, Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation)

BACKGROUND: Under Education Code sec. 1001.101, a driver education course must require the student to complete:

- seven hours of behind-the-wheel instruction in the presence of a licensed driver education instructor, parent, or other individual;
- seven hours of observation instruction; and
- 30 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction, including at least 10 hours of instruction that takes place at night, in the presence of a qualified adult.

DIGEST: HB 962 would expand from 30 to 50 the number of behind-the-wheel hours of instruction in the presence of a qualified adult required under a driver education course.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021, and would apply to a driver education course that began on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 962 would increase behind-the-wheel instruction hours required for driver training from 30 to 50, which would save lives and bring Texas more in line with most other states.

Motor vehicle fatalities are the leading cause of death for teenagers, causing nearly one-third of all deaths, and new drivers are more likely to be involved in an accident due to inexperience and risky behavior. Learning how to drive is complex and requires hours of practice. The more time an individual spends practicing, the less likely the individual is to get in accident. In fact, studies have found that nothing can replace supervised practice when it comes to safe driving — not even the age of the driver. By increasing the required hours of practice, the bill would help save the lives of young Texans.

Many states require at least 50 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction, and some require 70 hours or more. Studies have shown that states that require more driving practice for teenagers have a lower fatal crash rate than Texas does.

Driving students already must hold their learner's permits for six months, so they and their instructors would have plenty of time to complete the 50 hours of driving instruction. Also, the practice does not have to be with a parent but can be with another qualified adult. Although there are no enforcement measures to ensure that the full number of hours was completed, increasing the standard could encourage students and their instructors to complete more practice.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

By increasing the number of instruction hours required for driver training, HB 962 would increase barriers to receiving a driver's license and the burden on parents. The bill also could be unnecessary since there are no enforcement provisions to guarantee that parents instructed their children for the full number of hours.