

Bill calls for toughening licensing; schools don't have to offer driver's ed

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

On paper, teen driving was the topic.

Politically, it was the opening salvo in the 1997 battle over state aid to private schools.

On nearly party-line votes, Republicans in both chambers of the Michigan Legislature passed a bill stiffening the requirements for licensing for young drivers and sent it to Gov. John Engler for signing.

Opponents had two objections: • No longer are school districts mandated to offer driver's ed. "I am afraid that, without the mandate, some schools will drop it, and the cost of obtaining a driver's education course will make it difficult for some students to get a license," said Rep. Glenn Oxender, R-Sturgis.

He was one of two Republicans to vote against House Bill 4763. The House passed it 55-49.

• It allows state money to be used at private driving schools. "It's opening the door to state financing of private education, including religious education," said Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield. "The state should not be in the business of financing and subsidizing private education, and that is exactly what this law does. A very dangerous door has been opened."

The Senate passed the bill 20-17, a bare majority. Twenty Republicans voted yes, 15 Democrats and two outstate Republicans voted no, and one Detroit Democrat was absent.

Insurers ignored the ideological battle and praised the bill's effect on public safety.

Insurers like it

"There's no question that youthful drivers are considered high-risk drivers because they are in disproportionately more accidents than any other age group."

Gary Mitchell

Michigan Association of Insurance Agents

"There's no question that youthful drivers are considered high-risk drivers because they are in disproportionately more accidents than any other age group," said Gary Mitchell, spokesman for the Michigan Association of Insurance Agents. "This legislation will hopefully reduce the number of inexperienced drivers that are on the road."

MAIA said 15 percent of the 989,000 licensed drivers age 16-24 are involved in accidents each year while only 5 percent of the 65-75 group have accidents.

"We must act to protect our kids," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Dan Gustafson, R-Williamston. Both chambers passed different versions last spring, but it took months in a conference to produce a compromise.

The public school mandate is dropped in April of 1998, but Gustafson doubted that local schools would drop such a popular program. "Smaller schools can design consortiums with other districts. Each community's needs, not state law, will dictate the setup of its program."

The state will continue to use \$4 from every license for driver's ed. Schools offering driver's ed will be required to match state funds. Local schools may charge tuition only when spending for enhanced programs exceeds

state and local funding.

But opponent Greg Pitoniak, D-Taylor, called that a "backdoor tax increase."

The new law will take effect in April of 1997 and sets these graduated requirements:

• **Level 1** - Participants must be at least 14 years and nine months of age and have parental approval. They must complete successfully the first segment of driver's ed and passed vision and knowledge tests.

The license would be valid any time a parent or legal guardian accompanies the driver. Teens must log 50 hours of driving, including 10 hours at night.

They also must complete a second phase of driver's education and be free of crashes and violations for 90 days before applying

for a Level 2 license.

• **Level 2** - At age 16, they can obtain a provisional license after meeting first-level requirements. They must have passed a driver performance road test. They may drive only from 6 a.m. to midnight unless accompanied by a parent or traveling for work.

• **Level 3** - At age 17, drivers become eligible for the final tier if they have been crash-free and violation-free for six months at Level 2. All previous restrictions are removed.

How they voted

In the House of Representatives:

Voting yes were Republicans Lynn Baines of Redford, Jan Dolan of Farmington Hills, Gerald Law of Plymouth, James Ryan of Redford and Deborah Whyman of Canton.

Absent were Democrats Eileen DeHart of Westland and Tom Kelly of Wayne.

In the Senate, Republicans Loren Bennett of Canton and Robert Geake of Northville voted yes. Democrat George Z. Hart of Dearborn voted no.

Madonna University celebrates anniversary

RENEE SKOGLUND
STAFF WRITER

Madonna University marks the start of its 50th anniversary year this fall, and blue and gold celebratory banners proclaiming "Intellectual, Spiritual and Personal Growth" are flying high across the campus.

The library exhibit gallery is lined with five decades of photos and newspaper articles depicting the school's evolution from a primarily teacher-training school for women to a multi-program university that maintains a diverse profile within the community.

Sister Mary Lauriana Groszczyński, vice president for university advancement,

and Sister Mary Danatha Suchyta, a former president, were among the school's earliest graduates. "We're the common thread through the ages," said Sister Danatha.

"The first class was made up mostly of sisters. We were well-disciplined," said Sister Lauriana, who recalled an academic atmosphere of "lots of music, liberal arts, and an English professor who demanded a great deal."

Madonna's roots actually go back farther than 50 years. It was founded in 1937 as the Presentation of Blessed Virgin Mary Junior College for the

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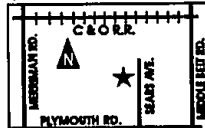
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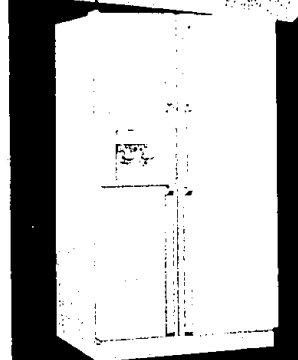
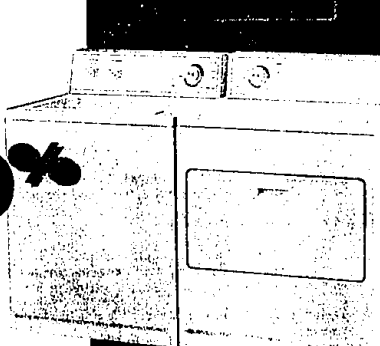
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