

## **Truitt Law Offices Scholarship Competition**

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### Changing the Course of Motor Vehicle Accidents Among Teenagers

2,364 deaths; over 300,000 injuries requiring emergency medical treatment; \$13.1 billion in total costs - however you want to statistically measure the fact that motor vehicle crashes are responsible for the most fatalities and injuries among teenagers in the United States, it is without a doubt that these alarming statistics make this contemporary issue one worth addressing.

Unfortunately, car accidents among teens (ages 15-19) are rising every year in the U.S., and in 2017, it was estimated that an average of six teens died every day from motor vehicle crashes (“Basic Facts About Teen Crashes”). This number doesn’t even take into account the hundreds more who were injured. In my experience, initiatives to promote safer driving were frequently implemented, but there is still more that could be done to reverse the concerning trends regarding motor vehicle accidents. From informative sessions at school to the requirement to participate in a Driver’s Education course, upcoming teen drivers in Hawaii were able to develop the skills and awareness to practice safe driving. However, some policies targeted at the demographic of younger drivers could be revised or added to contribute to a solution even more.

Upon getting my learner’s permit at age 15, I immediately enrolled in a local Driver’s Education course designed to teach new drivers about the laws and skills associated with driving a car. In Hawaii, successful completion of this comprehensive program was a crucial prerequisite to getting my provisional license. This class, which consisted of 30 hours of in-person classroom instruction and six hours of behind the wheel training, taught me so much about safe driving

practices. I was able to participate in this class through my small high school, which continues to provide Driver's Education opportunities to students multiple times a year. However, only 31 states require new drivers to complete a Driver's Education course prior to getting their license, and in many states, the extent of the curriculum is very minimal and brief ("State-by-State Overview"). I think that this requirement should be consistent among every state and community in the U.S. if the number of motor vehicle fatalities among teens is expected to keep increasing. The Research Institute at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia estimates that the majority of teen driver accidents are caused by poorly assessing a situation and slow reaction times, speeding, and external distractions ("Teen Drivers: Get the Facts"). By forcing teenagers to develop a better understanding of safe driving practices and exercise these habits under adult supervision, new young drivers are more equipped to operate motor vehicles safely and reduce risk to themselves and others. If more schools and local communities made Driver's Education programs accessible, the numbers of young drivers involved in fatal accidents would be expected to fall.

Increasing the amount of time teenagers are required to have their driver's permit could also reduce the severity of the issue. Safer driving could be indirectly promoted if states required that a learner's permit be held for longer than six months, allowing young drivers to gain more experience under adult supervision. Consequently, teenagers could develop more confidence when on the road, practice safe driving habits, and obtain a better understanding of the laws that must be followed when operating a motor vehicle.

Overall, the issue regarding deadly car crashes among teenagers is a significant, multifaceted problem. While I was able to be a part of a community that promoted and required

Driver's Education, this program is not mandatory in all states, even though it arguably should be. Also, aside from communities promoting an awareness of the issue and safe driving practices, this problem could be partially resolved by requiring new teen drivers to have their permit for longer than six months. If people work together and change the way teen drivers are being prepared to operate motor vehicles, we can reverse the increasing rate of fatal crashes among young drivers and make the roads a safer place for everyone.

Works Cited

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