



DRIVER EDUCATION AND LICENSING LEGISLATION (INFORMATIONAL PAPER)

An Overview of Recent Legislation in
Mississippi, Ohio, and Washington

ANSTSE

Association of National Stakeholders in Traffic Safety Education

ABSTRACT

This is a reference document summarizing the statutory language and specific requirements in Mississippi, Ohio, and Washington. It is intended to provide readers with a clear understanding of what recent legislation requires in each State.

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July 2026

Purpose of the Paper

States can use this informational paper and talking points (at the end of this paper) to inform policy decisions, improve driver education, and enhance roadway safety outcomes. It provides clear examples of recent legislation in Ohio and Washington, offering models for States to consider when updating their own driver licensing laws, particularly around extending driver education requirements to older novice drivers. The content also supplies data and rationale to support policy changes, helping States build a stronger case for expanding driver education and connecting these requirements to improved safety outcomes.

This resource is also valuable for States considering lowering the licensing age, as it provides insight into the potential safety implications and encourages consideration of alternative approaches. The data and examples highlight the benefits of strengthening driver education requirements and maintaining higher licensing age thresholds to reduce crash risk among young novice drivers. This supports informed decision-making that prioritizes safety over early licensure. Overall, the paper serves as both a reference and a roadmap to help States adopt more consistent, evidence-based approaches to driver education and licensing while prioritizing novice driver safety.

Introduction

All 50 states and the District of Columbia licensed almost 238 million drivers in 2023, the latest year in which nationwide data is available (Federal Highway Administration, 2025). Every state has required drivers to hold a driver license since 1954. Mandated examinations testing both driving skills and traffic safety knowledge have been in place since 1959 when South Dakota

became the last state to require a driver's exam (Nix, 2025). Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) started in the late 1990's and by 2006 every state had adopted some form of a GDL, or multi-stage beginner's driver license, for provisions such as nighttime restrictions, passenger restrictions, and multi-stage privileges to create a system of limiting risk conditions for individuals with little or no prior driving experience (Williams, McCartt, & Sims, 2016). Since 2023, state driver licensing legislation has been focused on:

- driver education,
- commercial driver license requirements,
- penalties for offenses of driving without a license or outside of driving privileges,
- digital driver licenses, and
- modifying the GDL.

Of particular interest is state legislation that has extended the requirement for state-approved driver education beyond the age of 17.

Summary of State Legislation

States

Three states, Mississippi (2024), Ohio (2025), and Washington (2025), have enacted legislation to require and extend the requirement for state-approved driver education as part of the driver license process.

Effective dates

- Ohio had two new laws passed in 2025. One new law took effect on June 30, 2025, and the second new law took effect on September 30, 2025.
- Washington's law is phased in starting on January 1, 2027, and the last phase begins on January 1, 2030.

- Mississippi’s law will take effect on July 1, 2027.

Ages covered

- As of June 30, 2025, Ohio requires driver education for limited term license applicants, or those who are in the state for a temporary period of time with a visa or other official temporary residential status documentation. As of September 30, 2025, Ohio requires all driver license applicants under the age of 21 to complete state-approved driver education.
- By 2030, all new Washington driver license applicants under the age of 22 will be required to complete state-approved driver education. Washington driver license applicants under the age of 25 must pass an online course on work zone and first responder safety effective May 1, 2026.
- As of July 1, 2027, Mississippi first-time driver license applicants of all ages will be required to complete state-approved driver education.

Multi-Stage Driver License Phases (e.g., GDL)

Applicants may enter the novice driver license system at the earliest eligible age, but the individual would remain subject to GDL requirements until reaching the upper age limits.

Learner’s Permit

- In Ohio, new drivers ages 15.5 – 17 must hold a learner’s permit for at least six months prior to obtaining a license, while drivers age 18 and older must obtain a permit, but are not required to hold it for a specific period.
- In Washington, drivers may apply for a permit at age 15 if they complete an approved driver training course; otherwise,

they must wait until age 15.5 to obtain a permit and cannot be licensed until age 18.

- In Mississippi, drivers may apply for a permit at age 15 and hold it for at least twelve months, while drivers age 17 and older must obtain a permit but are not required to hold it for a specific period.

Intermediate (Provisional) License

- Ohio’s intermediate (probationary) driver license phase starts at 16 years of age and ends at the age of 18.
- Washington’s intermediate driver license phase starts at 16 years of age and ends as early as the age of 18.

Full (Unencumbered) License

- Ohio’s full license phase starts at 18 years of age.
- Washington’s full license phase starts at 21 years of age as of January 1, 2027, and increases the age up to 25 years of age on January 1, 2030.
- Mississippi’s full license phase starts at 17 years of age.

Driver Education Course

- Ohio’s driver education course requires 24 hours of classroom education plus eight hours of behind-the-wheel training. The classroom portion can be delivered online, virtually, or in-person.
- Washington’s driver education course requires 30 hours of classroom education plus six hours of behind-the-wheel training.
- Mississippi’s driver education course requires 30 hours of classroom education plus six hours of behind-the-wheel training.

- Ohio's driver education curriculum guidelines are developed by the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Ohio Traffic Safety Office.
- Washington's driver education course content requirements are developed and approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Licensing.
- Mississippi's driver education course content requirements are developed and approved by the State Superintendent of Public Education and the Commissioner of Public Safety.

Driver Education Course Delivery

- Ohio's driver education classroom course can be delivered in-person, virtually or through a self-paced online provider.
- Washington's driver education classroom course can be delivered in-person or through a self-paced online program (starting in 2027). Both options require a behind-the-wheel portion.

Driver Education Funding

- Ohio's driver education courses are run by individual driver training enterprises that collect participant fees to fund their operations. The Ohio Traffic Safety Office provides funding for a grant program which provides scholarships to low-income youth to complete driver training.
- Washington's driver education system is funded by three primary sources including fees on the instruction permit, driver license, and vehicle registration. Additional funds may be used from speed safety camera system fines that are deposited into the Highway Safety Fund.

Driver Education Course Exemptions

- Ohio and Washington allow for an exemption if the applicant is transferring a license from a reciprocal jurisdiction.
- Washington also allows for an exemption if the applicant can show proof of similar education from such jurisdiction.

Miscellaneous – None noted as of May 11, 2026.

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State of Ohio Legislation

Completing Driver Education Before Getting Licensed Extended Up Through Age 20

Summary of Law

In 2025, the State of Ohio implemented new laws that require completion of driver education for all individuals under the age of 21 applying for a driver’s license and each person 21 years of age or older who is applying for an initial limited term license in the State. These individuals shall present satisfactory evidence of having successfully completed the state’s full driver training program. The new "Class D" driver training requirements will align limited term license applicants and 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds with the same driver training requirements currently in place for 16- and 17-year-olds (Ohio Revised Code Section 4507.21 and 4508.02, September 2025; Ohio Legislative Service Commission, 2025).

The new requirements for those under the age of 21, as well as those applying for limited term licenses, include:

Classroom Hours
A driver education course with 24 hours of in-person classroom, virtual, or online instruction: Covering motor vehicle operation, safe driving practices, traffic laws, and signs.
Behind-the-Wheel Hours
A driver education course with eight hours of behind-the-wheel instruction: Provided by a licensed driving instructor.
Supervised Driving Practice
50 hours of supervised driving practice: Including at least 10 hours of night driving, with an eligible adult as defined in Ohio Revised Code Section 4507.21 (I).

- Statutory exemptions are in place for some applicants, such as:
 - A person who receives a waiver of the examination by the registrar.
 - An initial limited term license applicant 21 years of age or older who is from a country with which the registrar has a reciprocal arrangement.
 - Courses administered by a branch of the U.S. armed forces for certain eligible applicants.
 - With additional documentation as prescribed by the Registrar:
 - Certain persons with valid, unexpired guest agricultural visas.
 - Certain persons with valid, unexpired visas that have a relationship with a hospital or health system.

Background Data

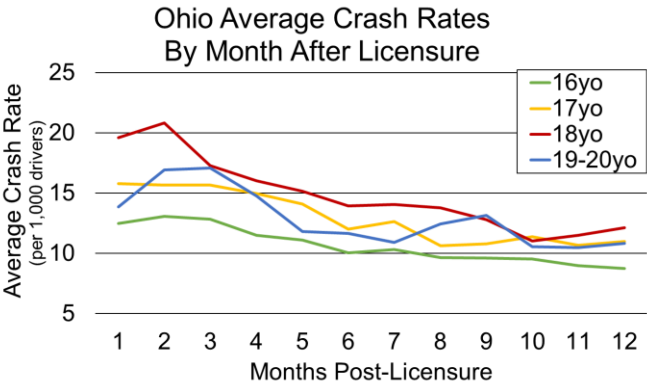
Data from the Ohio Department of Public Safety reveals a high number of crashes involving youthful drivers. According to their report, drivers aged 15 to 24 were involved in nearly one-third of all traffic crashes in Ohio from 2023 to 2024, with a total of 154,363 incidents (Ohio Traffic Safety Office, 2024).

A young driver's actions contributed to nearly two-thirds of the crashes they were involved in, and 66% of fatal crashes. From 2023-2025, the most common cause was following another vehicle too closely, which accounted for 29% of at-fault crashes. Other leading factors included failure to yield, driving off the road, and unsafe speed (Ohio Traffic Safety Office, 2026).

Male drivers in the 15-24 age group were more likely to be at fault than their female counterparts, making up 59% of at-fault crashes and 80% of fatal at-fault crashes.

While young drivers represent only about 11% of licensed drivers in the U.S. under age 24, they are overrepresented in crash statistics, according to the Federal Highway Administration (Ohio Traffic Safety Office, 2024).

Figure 1



An analysis completed by the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia displayed in Figure 1 showed those licensed before 18 had lower crash rates per 1,000 licensed drivers during the first year of licensure, while 18-year-old newly licensed drivers (exempt from young driver license policy at the time) had the highest crash rates of all new drivers under 25 (Walshe et al. 2022).

Governor Mike DeWine stated “We have so many young people turning 18, never taking driver education, they go in and ultimately after many failures, pass. Not acceptable. We know that young people who go through driver education training become safer drivers, safer for themselves and everyone else on the road. And that’s not just true for young people. It’s true for adults. This not only protects young drivers; it also protects everyone, our streets and our highways.” (Ingles, July 2, 2025).

An Expanded Description of Ohio Revised Code Section 4507.21 and 4508.02

In 2025, Ohio enacted a law expanding driver education requirements to include all young drivers under age 21. Effective September 30, 2025, any person 20 years old or younger (under 21) applying for their first Ohio driver’s license must complete the state’s full driver training program. Previously, only 16- and 17-year-olds were mandated to take formal driver education, but the new law aligns 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds with the same training process required for 16-17-year-olds. (Ohio Traffic Safety Office, 2025) (Note, in Ohio, teens can begin the classroom portion of driver education at age 15 and five months teens can begin driver’s education at age 15 and five months, however they must be 16 at the time they apply for their license.)

This course consists of several components, mirroring the requirements long in place for 16-17-year-old drivers (Ohio Traffic Safety Office, 2025):

Classroom Hours
24 hours of classroom or online instruction to be taken with a state-approved driver education provider, covering topics like motor vehicle operation, safe driving practices, Ohio traffic laws, and road signs. This can be completed in a traditional classroom setting, virtually, or through an Ohio-approved online course.
Behind-the-Wheel Hours
8 hours of behind-the-wheel training through supervised in-car instruction with a licensed driving instructor, through a licensed driving school. The student practices driving maneuvers

and safe driving habits under professional guidance during these sessions.

Supervised Driving Practice Hours

- An additional 50 hours of supervised driving practice with an eligible adult (age 21 or older) outside of class. At least 10 of the 50 hours must be at night (after sunset) to ensure experience with nighttime driving. This practice is usually done with a parent, guardian, or other responsible adult mentor in the passenger seat.

All the above training is verified at the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) before the applicant can schedule a road test. New drivers under the age of 21 will not be allowed to obtain a license until they have finished the 24 hours of theory, eight hours of in-car training, and 50 logged practice hours.

Financial assistance may be available for those who need help paying for driver education. The state continues to offer grants from the Ohio Traffic Safety Office to help low-income students afford the required training. Eligible families can visit [Drive to Succeed 2026 | Ohio Traffic Safety Office](#) or inquire with their driving school or Job and Family Services about any subsidy or voucher programs that offset the cost of the course.

“We know that young people who go through driver education training become safer drivers, safer for themselves and everyone else on the road.”

– Governor Mike DeWine

Logging and Verifying 50 Hours of Practice Driving

In addition to formal instruction, new drivers under age 21 must complete 50 hours of supervised practice driving with an eligible adult and document these hours. An “eligible adult” (defined as a parent, guardian, custodian, or an adult age 21 or older acting in that role) must supervise the learner during these practice drives.

To track supervised driving hours, the student or parent must maintain a driving log documenting the date, duration of each drive, and driving conditions (day or night, weather) for each practice session. The Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) provides an official form, the Fifty Hour Affidavit (Form BMV 5791), which was updated in 2025 to include a detailed log section, and must be used to certify completion of the required practice hours. New drivers can also use the RoadReady Ohio app to log their hours.

The main intent is to ensure that anyone in Ohio under age 21 getting their first license has gone through comprehensive driver education.

Once completed, the app will populate the affidavit and driving log. Either way hours are tracked, the eligible adult must complete the affidavit, certifying that the learner has completed the supervised practice driving requirement, including the required nighttime hours. The affidavit must be signed in the presence of a notary public and notarized. This notarized affidavit must then be submitted to the BMV Deputy Registrar at the time they apply for their license as proof of the completed practice requirement. Falsifying the affidavit is a legal

offense, therefore, all hours must be logged honestly and carefully. (Ohio Department of Public Safety, September 2025)

Permit Holding Period

The new law does not change the learner's permit holding period for adult drivers. Individuals aged 18–20 are not required to hold a temporary instruction permit for six months before taking the road test (the six-month waiting period continues to apply only to drivers aged 15.5 to 17 under Ohio's graduated driver licensing system). As a result, an 18-, 19-, or 20-year-old may complete the required training and supervised practice hours and take the license test without the mandatory permit period, provided all education and practice requirements have been met. A temporary permit is still required to practice driving legally; new drivers must obtain a learner's permit by passing the knowledge and vision tests at the BMV before beginning behind-the-wheel practice. However, once the permit is issued, 18–20-year-old learners can proceed at their own pace to complete the education and practice benchmarks, rather than being subject to a minimum time frame.

Out-of-State or Existing Licenses

The expanded training law applies to new license applicants under age 21. If an individual under age 21 already holds a full driver's license from another state, they are generally not required to take Ohio's driver training to transfer their license, although they should verify Ohio BMV's reciprocity rules.

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State of Washington

Completing Driver Education Before Getting Licensed Extended Up to Age 25

Summary of Law

On July 27, 2025, the State of Washington implemented a new law that focuses on improving young driver safety by requiring individuals under age 25 to complete a driver training education course before obtaining their initial driver's license. This requirement will be phased in, starting with those aged 18 to 19 in 2027 and extending to those under age 22 by 2030.

Additionally, applicants under age 25 must pass an online course on driver work zone and first responder safety starting May 1, 2026. The law allows for waivers of the training requirements under certain conditions, such as prior driving experience. There are new regulations for initial license holders, including mandatory safe driving courses for those committing traffic infractions, and the law specifies that licenses for individuals under 21 will expire on their 21st birthday or the second birthday after issuance, contingent upon completing a refresher course.

The driver training curriculum standards have been updated to include work zone and first responder safety awareness. Beginning on May 1, 2026, until January 1, 2031, the initial license applicant up to age 25 must pass a free online work zone and first responder safety course that is provided by the Department of Licensing (DOL). Starting January 31, 2031, public and private schools will be required to include work

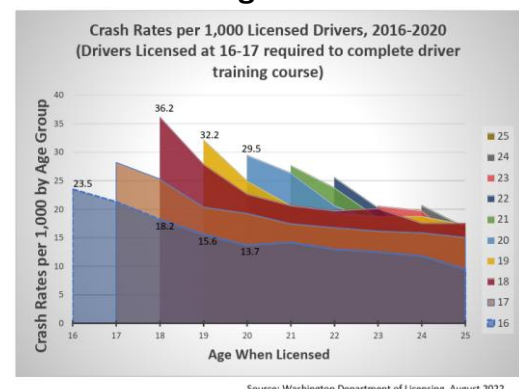
zone and first responder training in their curriculum.

A new voucher program that starts on January 1, 2027, has been created to assist low-income individuals with covering driver training costs. In addition, the law establishes a partnership with tribal governments to support driver education in tribal communities and creates a driver education safety improvement account funded by traffic fines and fees. Finally, the law modifies the management of the treasury income account to streamline the distribution of earnings and specifies effective dates for various provisions, including the establishment of the driver education safety improvement account. (State of Washington Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1878 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session, May 2025)

Background Data

During 2017-2021, drivers between the ages of 16 and 25 years of age represented 20 percent of all drivers involved in a fatal collision. But the differences in crash rates were substantially lower among young drivers who had completed a driver education course. Comparing drivers 18-25, those who had not completed a driver training course had a 70 percent higher rate of injury or fatal crash involvement. (State of Washington, 2024)

Figure 2



Washington requires young drivers ages 16 and 17 to complete a driver education course that meets the elements determined by the DOL or the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to obtain an intermediate driver license (Washington State Legislature, 2025). Education coupled with other intermediate license requirements appears to have a dramatic impact on the safety of the youngest drivers. State data displayed in Figure 2 shows that drivers who are subject to intermediate license requirements (ages 16-17) became much safer drivers, compared to their peers who begin driving at ages 18-25. (Washington State Legislature, 2025)

Crashes and Fatalities of Young Drivers
Young drivers aged 15-24 make up just 10.6% of the driving population, however they accounted for 26% of all fatalities and 29% of all serious injuries between 2020 and 2022.
Fatalities Involving Impairment of Young Drivers
For the 519 young driver involved fatalities occurring in Washinton State between 2020 and 2022 (State of Washington, 2024): 63.8% also included impairment (which includes alcohol impairment as well as driver under the influence of drugs);
Fatalities Involving Speeding of Young Drivers
41.2% also included speeding; and
Fatalities of Young Drivers Who Were Unrestrained
27.7% also included unrestrained occupants.

From 2020-2022, fatal and serious injury crash involvement rates for young drivers were highest for drivers ages 18 and 19, the ages at which young drivers can currently be licensed without a Graduated Driver License (GDL) and before they reach the legal drinking age of 21, respectively.

Novice drivers aged 18-20 have crash rates that are double the rates of same-age peers who were licensed at 16 (and subject to all intermediate license requirements).

Injury/fatal crashes among drivers licensed at ages 18-25 could be reduced by 17% if the requirements for driver education and intermediate licensing applied to them.
- WTSC, 2021

Among the groups, only 45 percent had received driver training, while 55 percent had not. Survey data from Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) in 2020 found that more than half of young drivers who waited or planned to wait to be licensed at age 18 or older did so to avoid the cost of driver education, which is substantial (\$400 - \$750 per course in 2020). Low-income students, who also include disproportionate numbers of Black and Hispanic students, were more likely to wait, thereby missing the safety benefits of driver education and intermediate licensing.

Using the data from DOL, the WTSC conservatively estimated that injury/fatal crashes among drivers licensed at ages 18-25 could be reduced by 17 percent if the requirements for driver education and intermediate licensing applied to them. This translates to approximately 4,000 fewer injuries or fatalities in Washington per year. Policy

makers can consider multiple strategies. Some strategies include:

- Increasing access to driver education by reducing the cost for students generally or subsidizing the cost for low-income drivers specifically would allow more drivers to receive training and an intermediate license at age 16 or 17.
- Extending intermediate license requirements to older novice drivers (18+) is another approach to increase safe driving behaviors. In this approach, it would also be advisable to increase access to and affordability of state authorized driver training courses to avoid exacerbating existing inequities (WTSC, 2021).

An Expanded Description of RCW 28A.220.030

Mandatory driver education for young adults will be phased in. Individuals between 18 and 22 years of age will need to complete a driver education course before obtaining their initial driver's license based on the following schedule:

• Beginning January 1, 2027: Ages 18 but under 19.
• Beginning January 1, 2028: Ages 18 but under 20.
• Beginning January 1, 2029: Ages 18 but under 21.
• Beginning January 1, 2030: Ages 18 but under 22.

(Transportation Committee, House of Representatives, Washington State, 2025; State of Washington Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1878 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session, May 2025)

Safe Driving Course for Repeat Infractions

A mandatory course, for young adults with repeat infractions on their driver record, will be phased-in based on the following schedule:

• Beginning January 1, 2027, initial license holders aged 18-21 with two moving violation infractions must complete a safe driving course or face license suspension.
• From January 1, 2027, to January 1, 2031, initial license holders aged 22-24 with two moving violations must complete a safe driving course.
• Beginning January 1, 2031, this cohort (22-24) will instead need to complete a condensed traffic safety education course for two such infractions.

(Transportation Committee, House of Representatives, Washington State, 2025; State of Washington Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1878 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session, May 2025)

Driver Education Refresher Course

Beginning January 1, 2031, individuals under 21 renewing their initial driver's license must complete a driver education refresher course.

Enhancements to Driver Training Curriculum Standards and Delivery

Beginning on May 1, 2026, until January 1, 2031, the initial license applicant up to age 25 must pass a free online work zone and first responder safety course that is provided by the DOL. Starting January 31, 2031, public and private schools will be required to include work zone and first responder training in their curriculum.

Driver education schools are encouraged to incorporate self-paced online components for

classroom instruction to focus teaching resources on topics that lead to behind-the-wheel training. Schools may offer up to four hours of behind-the-wheel instruction in a single day in cases of hardship.

The Washington DOL may approve the use of electronic translation devices for driver education, including behind-the-wheel instruction, and for examination and assessment purposes.

(Washington DOL and Washington OSPI, 2025)

Programs to Expand Access and Improve Instructor Quality

Subject to funding, the DOL will establish a program to expand education and certification training opportunities for driver training school instructors. This includes:

• developing a comprehensive traffic safety education program for instructors,
• mentorship programs,
• financial incentives to encourage diversity,
• streamlining certification with the Washington OSPI, and
• facilitating partnerships between private driving schools and educational institutions.

(Washington DOL and Washington OSPI, 2025)

Driver Training Education Voucher Program

Beginning January 1, 2027, and subject to funding, a voucher program will be established to help individuals aged 15-24 from low-income households cover the costs of various driver education courses. The DOL will develop the policy framework and guidelines for this program

in consultation with relevant agencies (Washington DOL, 2025).

Tribal Partnership Program

Beginning July 1, 2026, subject to funding, the DOL will establish a program to partner with tribal governments to provide young driver education and training in tribal communities.

Funding and Oversight

A new dedicated account, the "driver education safety improvement account," is created in the state treasury. This account will receive portions of driver's application fees, driver instruction permit fees, a portion of the specialty license plate fee, and excess revenue from speed safety camera systems in work zones. Funds will be used for expanding and improving driver education programs, including the online safety course, instructor education, the voucher program, and the tribal partnership program.

The DOL is required to report annually to the legislature on the implementation of the expanded driver education requirements for young adults and the readiness of the system to accommodate growth. Annual reports are also required for the instructor education program and the voucher program. Biennial reports are required for the tribal partnership program.

The DOL can pause or delay the new driver education requirements for young adults if there's an insufficient number of courses or instructors. The waivers for the driver training education course requirement can be granted under specific hardship conditions or if equivalent out-of-state education is proven will continue as it is today. (Transportation Committee, House of Representatives, Washington State, 2025)

Fee Adjustments to support the driver education system, all added fees are sent to the driver education safety improvement account:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The application fee for a new driver's license will increase from \$35 to \$50 on or after January 1, 2026. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The application fee for a driver's instruction permit will increase from \$25 to \$35 on or after January 1, 2026. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The license service fee for vehicle registration or other rights to operate a vehicle will increase from 50 cents to 75 cents. |

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