

Driver Education and Licensing Legislation Summary

July 2026

States can use these talking points as a tool to inform policy decisions, improve driver education programs, and enhance roadway safety outcomes. This resource offers examples and data from Ohio and Washington to guide States in updating driver licensing laws, emphasizing the benefits of stronger driver education, higher licensing age thresholds, and evidence-based policies that enhance novice driver safety. It serves as both a reference and roadmap for informed, safety-focused decision-making.

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.

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 starts 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.

Graduated Diver License Phases (Multi-Stage Driver License):

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 applicable 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 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 instruction plus eight hours of behind-the-wheel training. The classroom portion can be delivered online, virtually, or in-person. Ohio's driver education curriculum guidelines are developed by the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Ohio Traffic Safety Office. Washington's driver education course requires 30 hours of classroom education plus six hours of behind-the-wheel training. 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. Mississippi's driver education course requires 30 hours of classroom instruction plus six hours of behind-the-wheel training.

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.

References

Federal Highway Administration (2025). Licensed Drivers by State, 1949 - 2023.

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2023/dl201.cfm>.

Nix, E. (2025). When was the first U.S. driver's license issued?

<https://www.history.com/articles/when-was-the-first-u-s-drivers-license-issued>.

Williams, A.F., McCartt, A.T., and Sims, L.B. (2016). Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. History and current status of state graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws in the United States.

<https://www.iihs.org/research-areas/bibliography/ref/2091#:~:text=Methods:%20The%20history%20of%20laws,been%20made%20in%20recent%20years>.

State of Mississippi (2024). Bill Text SB 2695

<https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2024/html/SB/2600-2699/SB2695IN.htm>.

State of Washington (2025). Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1878.

<https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1878-S.PL.pdf#page=1>.