

STATEMENT OF
Natalie Hayford, Anoka (MN) High School SADD
On the Introduction of the
Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act (H.R. 1895)
United States Capitol, Washington, D.C.
April 23, 2009

Hello, my name is Natalie Hayford, and I am a member of the Students Against Destructive Decisions chapter at my high school in Anoka, Minnesota. Our SADD chapter is working hard at our school and throughout our community to educate teens about safer driving. Our goal is to eliminate teen deaths and injuries caused by car crashes. This is especially important in our part of Minnesota, with rural roads that are especially hazardous for teen drivers.

We created a campaign called "Get the 411 on Teen Drivers! Stay Connected! Save Teen Lives!" to spread the message of safe driving to teens – and people of all ages – in Anoka. But this is something that needs to be addressed not just in our town or just the state of Minnesota, but across the nation.

As a teenager, it's scary to know that more young people die from car crashes than any other kind of accident or disease. I want all teenagers to realize that they hold a lot in their hands when they get behind the wheel of a car. Teens are inexperienced drivers – yes, we admit it! – and we need as few distractions as possible. One of the benefits of Graduated Driver Licensing is that it gives us a framework for making good driving decisions. And it helps us fight peer pressure, too. It's a lot easier to say "It's against the law," than it is to say "No, all six of you can't have a ride home."

Our SADD chapter created a website, www.teendriver411.com, to educate teen drivers about teen driving facts and the laws for newly licensed teen drivers. Laws are complicated, and it's not always easy to get information. It's even more complicated when you realize that all 50 states have their own set of rules. Why should teens in one state be safer than teens in another state?

Each and every state should do everything they can to protect teen drivers no matter where he or she lives. If we wait years for states to act on their own, thousands of kids in my generation are at risk of crashing, being injured, or even dying. We deserve better. I'm here today to ask members of Congress to provide the leadership needed now, to push states toward much-needed changes now, so lives can be saved starting now.

Critics may ask, "What about rural teens who need to drive themselves into town for school or work?" As teen from a rural area, I'm here to say that rural driving is dangerous and potentially deadly for new drivers. It's better to have strong GDL programs that help teens become safe drivers. School and work don't matter if you're killed in a crash.

Thank you for the chance to speak today and send this message – from a teen, about teen driving – to Congress and lawmakers in all 50 states. Take it not just from a doctor, a police officer, an executive, and an activist ... take it from a member of the next generation of doctors, police officers, executives, activists ... and even the next generation of members of Congress: support teen driver safety by supporting the STANDUP Act. I encourage everyone to get involved -- visit the saferoads4teens.org website, join our Facebook group, organize people in your community like we have in Anoka. STAND UP for teen driving safety!