

MINUTES
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 26, 2026

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Okuniewicz, Vice Chairman Keyser, Senators Burtenshaw, Hart, Galloway, Kohl, Rabe, and Semmelroth

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Adams

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Okuniewicz** called the meeting of the Senate Transportation Committee (Committee) to order at 1:30 p.m.

H 628 **MOTOR VEHICLES - Amends existing law to revise provisions regarding the Parent-Student On-Road Driver's Training Program. Representative Ron Mendive** stated the bill made two changes. First, it allowed urban school districts to offer driver's education programs and also permitted parents to teach their children to drive. Previously, urban districts could only allow parent-taught driver's education if the district did not provide a program. The Coeur d'Alene School District had discontinued its program to allow parent instruction but had indicated it preferred the flexibility to do both. The change restored that option statewide. Second, the bill removed a specific online provider that had been listed in statute for the required 30 hours of classroom instruction. Other online options remained available, but the named provider was removed to avoid singling out one entity.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Okuniewicz** stated he recalled last year's bill allowed students in rural areas, where driver's education was difficult to access, to complete instruction with their parents. He asked whether the current bill simply extended that same flexibility to students in urban districts, allowing them to choose parent-taught instruction even if the district offered a program. He also asked whether the change would affect insurance coverage, create additional liability or risk, or impact insurance rates for families who chose the parent-taught route. **Representative Mendive** responded that the bill simply allowed urban districts to offer both options—school-based driver's education and parent-taught instruction—where current law required them to choose only one. He noted that some districts had canceled or were considering canceling their programs, and the change would give them flexibility to reinstate programs without eliminating the parent-taught option. He also stated that there would be no change to insurance coverage or rates. Insurance treatment remained the same whether a student completed driver's education through a school district program or through a parent-taught course.

Senator Semmelroth noted that while last year's legislation focused on expanding access in rural areas, this bill extended the option to urban areas where more driver's education programs were available. She questioned how quality control would be ensured for parent-taught instruction and asked whether a parent with a poor driving record—such as tickets, DUIs, or reckless driving history—would still be permitted to teach their child to drive. **Representative Mendive** responded that the requirement was essentially the same as current practice. Students were required to complete 50 hours of supervised driving with

a parent, in addition to approximately six hours with a trained driver's education instructor. He noted that most of the instruction time was already conducted by parents.

Senator Rabe noted that the area had become significantly more urban over the past 20 years, with increased pedestrians, bicyclists, and traffic complexity. She referenced pedestrian fatalities in the Treasure Valley and Canyon County and asked whether additional driver training requirements or enhanced instruction should be considered in urban areas to address the growing safety challenges and varied road users. **Representative Mendive** responded that rural areas experienced approximately 77 percent more traffic fatalities than urban areas, though he was unsure how that statistic directly related to drivers training. He suggested fatalities in rural areas could be higher due to factors such as delayed emergency response. He reiterated that the bill did not change the overall driver's education structure, aside from the six hours spent with a certified instructor, noting that parents already supervised the required 50 hours.

TESTIMONY:

Lisa Brady, testified representing St. Rose School. She explained that she was a trained cycling instructor, had represented Idaho at the National Bike Summit, and had taught driver's education on bicycle and pedestrian safety since 2013. She also presented to all Idaho driver's-ed instructors in 2014 and continued to do so annually. She opposed **H 628**, arguing that while parent-led driver education was useful in rural areas with limited access to instructors, it was unnecessary in urban areas. She emphasized that professional driving instructors received continuing education to stay current with laws, infrastructure, and techniques, while the bill's parent-led option lacked such requirements. She warned that parents, despite good intentions, could pass biases, overconfidence, or unsafe habits to their children. She stressed the need for high standards in driver education to protect all road users, especially vulnerable ones, and argued that improving funding and access for professional instruction and not expanding parent-led programs, was the proper solution.

Lori Solders from New Plymouth, Idaho, testified representing the Idaho Coalition for Motorcycle Safety. She explained that the parent-led driver education program had originally passed in 2024 for rural areas without local programs, but the proposed expansion would apply statewide. She opposed **H 628**, arguing it would weaken driver training standards and create safety risks for Idaho teens and the public. **Ms. Solders** noted that professional driver education taught more than vehicle operation, including hazard perception, defensive decision-making, and accountability, while parents might not fully understand legal risks if a teen caused an accident. She cited statistics showing drivers aged 16–19 had nearly three times higher fatal crash rates than older drivers, with motor vehicle crashes being the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, emphasizing the importance of quality training. She warned that statewide expansion could reduce program quality, increase risks to motorcyclists, pedestrians, and bicyclists, and compromise public safety, and she urged a "no" vote on **H 628**.

Tonya Haristvert representing Philips Driving School, testified in strong opposition to **H 628**. She explained that the previous year's legislation had addressed the needs of rural areas with minimal traffic and simpler road systems, but the driving environment in urban areas like the Treasure Valley was much more complex. She argued that while the bill claimed to provide parental choice, Idaho law already allowed students age 17 to obtain a license or permit without formal driver education, letting parents assume instruction at that age. However, parents lacked dual-control brakes, continuing education, and updated knowledge of traffic laws, unlike professional instructors. She concluded that parents were not fully equipped to safely teach driving in urban areas, which could endanger

students and other road users.

Marisa Keith a parent of three and a Safe Routes to School advocate, testified in opposition to **H 628**. She explained that two of her children had completed driver's education through public and private programs, and one was about to begin instruction with Phillips Driving School. She emphasized that driving was a privilege with responsibilities, and while parents can teach many life skills, they were not equipped to teach all aspects of driving, especially in complex urban environments with large intersections, freeway interchanges, and evolving road systems.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Keyser** moved to send **H 628** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Hart** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**. **Senators Rabe, Semmelroth** and **Burtenshaw** requested to be recorded as voting nay.

COMMENT: **Senator Rabe** expressed concern about local driving safety and recent fatalities, noting that while parents could provide 50 hours of instruction, the additional six hours with a professional instructor were valuable given urban challenges. She also noted scheduling difficulties for high school students but acknowledged that parents could still choose paid professional instruction if desired.

GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENT: **Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Appointment of Gaston Patterson to the Aeronautics Advisory Board, for a term commencing January 31, 2026 and expiring January 31, 2031.** **Gaston Patterson** introduced himself to the Committee, stating he served as the Coeur d'Alene Airport Director and fire chief. He described his long career in aviation, beginning at age 15, and his experience across airport operations, commercial and private aviation, aerospace manufacturing, and new aircraft projects. He noted that he had built two aircraft, was a pilot, and had spent roughly 80 percent of his career in public service, including a brief tenure as a Kootenai County deputy. He emphasized his family background in fire and first response and expressed pride in his experience, stating his goal was to support Idaho's aviation transportation system and ensure its safety.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Kohl** inquired about the upcoming opportunities Idaho could pursue in aviation and the aviation industry, and asked for an explanation of the duties and roles of the Aeronautics Advisory Board, including what their typical day-to-day functions entailed. **Mr. Patterson** stated that he saw growing opportunities for aerospace and aviation manufacturing in Idaho, particularly high-paying, low-volume manufacturing jobs relocating to the region, which would benefit the economy without significantly impacting air traffic. He also described how Coeur d'Alene had implemented a new type of temporary air traffic control tower to improve safety, which the federal government was now considering for broader adoption. He explained that the Aeronautics Advisory Board provided guidance to the Transportation Committee and Governor, addressed constituent concerns, and offered oversight on aeronautical matters, including airport funding, safety issues, and the State's aircraft fleet.

PRESENTATION: Introduction of Senate Page Olivia Earle. **Olivia Earle** introduced herself as new to the Boise area, having spent the first 14 years of her life in Westport, Connecticut, and described the cultural and lifestyle differences she experienced between the East Coast and Idaho. She shared her personal interests, including participation on the Boise High mock trial team, ballet (which she had done for ten years), horseback riding, reading, music, and outdoor activities like river trips, bird hunting, and clay shooting with her dad. She noted her dual citizenship through her Dutch mother, spoke about learning Dutch, Afrikaans, and French, and expressed interest in international law and potentially working in Europe. For future plans, she intended to attend college in Washington, D.C., preferably Georgetown or George Washington University, with aspirations to work in government, possibly in the White House or for a Senate office. She reflected on the differences between Connecticut and Idaho, noting the East Coast's efficiency and work-focused attitude versus Idaho's friendliness, neighborliness, access to nature, and compassionate community.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Okuniewicz** adjourned the meeting at 2:14 p.m.

Senator Okuniewicz
Chair

Melissa Price
Secretary