



February 3, 2014

Senator Jerry Petrowski, Chair
Senate Committee on Transportation,
Public Safety, and Veterans and Military Affairs
123 South
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

RE: SB 480 - the renewal of operator's licenses by persons 75 years of age or older

Dear Sen. Petrowski,

The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), Inc. wishes to express concerns regarding SB 480. Requiring a person who is 75 years of age or older to renew his or her operator's license every four years rather than every eight years will cost older drivers more money and uses age, not ability, as the criteria for determining the length of the renewal period.

The vast majority of us will outlive our ability to drive, but safe driving is about ability – not age. Choosing an arbitrary age to implement additional requirements and mandating different policies specifically for people over a certain age is unfair to older adults and may actually prematurely curtail the mobility of drivers who are already self-regulating and managing their driving. Any changes to existing standards or policies should be based upon best practices for safe driving and implemented for all licensed drivers.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety notes that, “For drivers 65 and older, fatality rates per licensed driver did not differ for states with and without laws for vision testing, road testing or shortened renewal periods.”

The 2011 report, “Addressing Elderly Mobility Issues in WI” done for the Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation by the Center for Freight and Infrastructure Research & Education (CFIRE) cautions against age-triggered assessments for license retention. Other research suggests that age-based mandatory assessment programs may not effectively identify and manage the small portion of older motorists whose driving should be limited or stopped.

Legislators should be commended for their attention to aging issues; however, age-based licensing requirements are not only unfair, they are unwarranted in the absence of evidence indicating improved safety would result. While, it is true that older adults have the highest fatality rate in accidents, the CDC reports, “This is largely due to increased susceptibility to injury and medical complications among older drivers rather than an increased tendency to get into crashes.”

Wisconsin already has procedures in place for any licensing agency in the state to make decisions about an individual's fitness to drive based upon ability— regardless of age. The WI Department of Motor Vehicles has a

Medical Review Unit and extensive information about and procedures in place to assess driving safety. In fact, recommendations from the 2011 CFIRE report include funding the medical review unit adequately to enable them to help make decisions on anyone's ability to drive safely and include implementing in-person renewals for people of all ages. The expansion of Wisconsin's medical review unit and development of assessments based upon "triggers" or "reports" of problems related to ability versus age would not impose any additional barriers to older drivers who do not have difficulties driving.

Many older people already self-regulate their driving as they age, traveling only on familiar routes during daylight hours, avoiding left turns and sticking to less complex roads with lower traffic volumes during non-peak travel times. At some point, however, many of us will outlive our ability to drive. This is a significant issue that is noticeably missing in many conversations about driver licensing. What happens when someone can no longer drive safely and cannot renew their license? Better and increased alternatives to driving, make it easier for people of any age not to drive, even teens who have the highest accident rate - much higher than older adults. Increased emphasis on mobility and housing options, complete streets and land use planning is needed. Without affordable and accessible transportation options, people will continue to drive, some even when it is no longer safe. Many simply have no other choice.

Instead of implementing arbitrary age-triggered requirements, our time and resources will be better spent making sure people remain able to get around their community even when they cannot or choose not to drive. Without planning and investing in transportation systems for the years when we are not able to drive; many will literally be stuck without options.

Sincerely,



Janet L. Zander
Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator

cc: Sen. Risser, Sen. Lehman, Sen. Harris, Sen. Miller
Rep. Berceau, Rep. Wright, Rep. Bernier, Rep. Sargent, Rep. Spiros