

Testimony of Katelyn Houchins - age 16, Hugo, MN

My statement about the driver's license testing in the state of MN.

Driving. It is a huge responsibility but also brings so much freedom. I've been excited to drive for a number of years. Last year, the day after my 15th birthday, I took my permit test. My mom and I stopped at a church on the way home after passing my test and completed my first hour of driving. I was hooked! Over the next year, I drove every chance I got, logging in well over 150 hours, even taking time off for a concussion, broken leg, and COVID. I was ready for my driver's test, scheduled for my 16th birthday.

How did I get my test scheduled for my 16th birthday? I researched when I could schedule my test and learned I could do it 6 months in advance. On my half birthday, I scheduled my driver's test to make sure I could get my license on my birthday. Why schedule so early? My birthday is May 14th which means I'm one of the youngest kids in the grade. I listened to my friends talking for months about trying to schedule their tests but having to wait for weeks or months before finding an open appointment.

Even the best-laid plans sometimes go awry. Who would have thought that when we left school for spring break on March 6th we wouldn't be back? Not me! COVID - 19 turned so many spring plans upside-down. At first, I wasn't worried. The stay at home order was due to expire in April, well before my test. Many friends had their test canceled, mine was still a month out, I hoped I would be ok. The stay at home order was then extended to early May. More friends had their long-awaited tests canceled, I was getting nervous. Finally, the stay at home order was set to expire on May 18th, just days after my 16th birthday on May 14th. I was so disappointed.

How did I find out my test was canceled? By spending HOURS of the phone with the DMV office. Each day I would try calling the DMV to see what was happening with drivers tests. I called the DMV multiple times over the span of multiple days and usually didn't get any answer. Finally around my dozenth call I was put on hold to talk to a person. After holding for 56 minutes I finally talked to someone. They told me that I wasn't able to reschedule my test at that time and I should keep checking online. A couple of days before my birthday I received an email and text officially canceling my test with no information on rescheduling.

The week after my birthday my grandma let me know that people would be allowed to reschedule tests based on when their test was originally scheduled. If your test was canceled in March you would be able to reschedule on May 22nd, April testers on May 23rd and May testers on May 26th. One of my friends whose test was originally scheduled in March rescheduled his first thing after getting the email on May 22nd; he got his test on June 9th. I was devastated!!! I had made my appointment before he did but because my birthday was later I had a later test day. Knowing that he had to wait to test until June I figured I was looking at testing in at least August, if not September or October. This was a huge inconvenience to my self and my parents. I was fortunate enough to get a job at a local farm for the summer but without my driver's license, my parents were driving me both ways, spending an hour in the car each day to get me to and from work. Looking at the fall, my family was counting on my being able to drive to school. Last year I had to be driven early 4 mornings a week due to band and student

council. This year I would be going to the other campus of White Bear Lake High School, which is 20 minutes from my house and it would be a big hardship for my parents to drive me in early every day. They were counting on my being able to drive so they could get my 4 younger siblings off to school.

My best friend had an April test scheduled, I didn't dare ask her over Memorial Day weekend if she rescheduled because I didn't want her to take a testing spot away from me. That weekend my parents talked. They decided that if we could get a test date a month earlier we would drive anywhere in the state. If we could get the test 2 weeks earlier we would go up to 2 hours. Tuesday, May 26th came. I was working so my mom was in charge of scheduling my test. When the reschedule email came she logged onto the DMV website and was clicking through the testing sites. She told me that most of the sites simply said "no appointments available". Site after site with nothing. She found one in late August somewhere she had never heard of. Then she found a test the first week in June in Bemidji. She almost took it thinking we would take a road trip up there but decided to keep looking for something a bit closer. Her search paid off, she hit jackpot at the Eagan site which had numerous tests available starting on May 28th, just 2 days away. I got my test scheduled on May 28th. I immediately told my best friend and asked if she had rescheduled her test from April. She had not, I told her to look in Eagan. She was unable to look until the next morning. By the time she scheduled her test, 18 hours after I scheduled mine, she was unable to get a test take until August!! In retrospect, my parents suspect that a new tester was hired over memorial day weekend I was lucky enough to hit the jackpot and get an early test. Another of my friends had her test scheduled on June 18th. However, her test was scheduled at Stillwater which has not yet reopened. Her test was canceled and is now rescheduled for August 13th, nearly 2 months after her original test date. This is super unlucky for her, had she schedule her test at a different location, on the original date, she could have tested, today. But now she will have to wait until Aug 13.

The Minnesota 2019 Statute number 171.13 subdivision 5D states that if a person is eligible to take the road test they must be able to do so within 14 days of requesting a test time. The MN driver's license testing system has been broken for some time. The government shutdown for the Covid-19 pandemic was necessary but further complicated an already messy situation. My friends and classmates are routinely waiting months to schedule driver's tests and/ or traveling far outstate to get a more timely testing date.

In summary:

- Long waits for testing times is putting a large burden on students and families. It may not be possible to know your schedule 6 months in advance to schedule a driver's test. It is also a huge burden to drive to outstate MN in order to take the test in a more timely manner.
- The priority rescheduling and expanded hours of the DMV are a start. But there are thousands of people, young and old waiting to take their driver's license test. The expanded hours should be permanent so that people can schedule a driver's test in a reasonable amount of time, perhaps even the 2 weeks required by law.
- In addition, there need to be more possible ways to get your license. That may mean hiring additional testers at existing sites. Or it may mean alternative methods for getting your license. One idea would be to allow behind the wheel instructors to issues driver's licenses like they do in North Dakota. Behind the wheel instructors spend 2 hours at a

time with students, they have a much more complete picture of a student's true driving ability and habits than the testing personal who spend only 10-20 minutes per person. Allowing behind the wheel instructors to license students whom they feel are exceptional drivers would open up testing appointments for non-traditional drivers, personal seeking CDL, and more.

Please help my friends and four younger siblings be able to have a timely way to obtain their driver's license. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Katelyn Houchins
Age 16, Hugo, MN