

Good morning Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Deanna Askew and I am the Director of the Division of Injury and Violence Prevention at the North Dakota Department of Health. I am not a motorcycle expert. Our division works to prevent and reduce injuries to North Dakotans. I am here to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 2194.

This bill proposes to allow an adolescent less than 16 years of age to operate a motorcycle with an increased engine size from 250 cubic centimeters (cc) to 510 cc. An increased motor size allows an operator to reach a higher speed more quickly and travel at an increased speed.

Along with increased speeds, these larger motorcycles could also be more difficult to control, especially for the age group referenced in this bill. This could increase the risk of a crash, leading to death or injury. Although there were no North Dakota deaths due to motorcycles to 14 or 15-year-olds in 2016-2017 (NDDoH Vital Records), there were seven documented injuries due to motorcycles during that same time (ND Department of Transportation). Adolescents differ from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions. The region of the brain that is responsible for immediate reactions including fear and aggressive behavior develops early, while the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. This part of the brain is still changing and maturing well into adulthood.

Based on the stage of their brain development, adolescents are more likely to act on impulse, get into accidents of all kinds, and engage in dangerous or risky behavior. These brain differences don't mean that young people can't make good decisions or tell the difference between right and wrong. However, an awareness of these differences can help parents, teachers, advocates, and policy makers understand, anticipate, and manage the behavior of adolescents. (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry)

There are only 17 states, including North Dakota, that allow people under age 16 to operate a motorcycle. Of these 17 states, 15 have operating restrictions.

Four states, including North Dakota, mention engine size in their restrictions. New Jersey requires the motorcycle operator be 17 years old; therefore, not allowing 14 to 15-year-olds to operate motorcycles regardless of engine size.

The following are additional examples of restrictions from other states:

- Tennessee allows an operator to be 15 years old with restrictions on the distance to be traveled from home (7 miles), the time of day (4 a.m. to 8 p.m.), and the engine size (125 cc).
- Arkansas restricts operators aged 14 to 15 years old to an engine size between 50 cc and 250 cc.
- In Alaska, 14 and 15-year-olds receive a permit but must be under the supervision of a licensed motorcycle operator until at least age 19. The engine size for 14 to 15-year-olds is restricted to 50 cc.
- South Dakota allows operators 14 to 18 years old to have a permit that allows motorcycle travel between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m.

The North Dakota Department of Health urges a do not pass for SB 2194 to reduce the risk of injury and death of North Dakotans. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.