

Safety, and more than a dozen other groups.

The Senate has passed a graduated licensing bill this year without the curfew language.

And the public seems to favor graduated licensing.

An April 1997 Minneapolis *Star Tribune* poll of 800 adults revealed 79 percent of respondents favored a midnight driving curfew.

Under the House bill, the minimum age for a full driver's license would be 17. In the *Star Tribune* poll, 54 percent favored raising that age limit from 16 to 17.

The attempt to restrict younger drivers is not just a Minnesota effort.

Under the enhanced California law that takes effect July 1, a 16-year-old with a provisional license will have to be accompanied by parent or licensed driver 25 or older in order to drive between midnight and 5 a.m. Currently, in California, the restriction applies only to those who are 15 and a half and have a learner's permit.

The California measure also will incorporate a trend toward combining driver's education with graduated licensing.

Worldwide research has indicated that people who merely graduate from driver's education courses do not have fewer subsequent crashes than drivers who learned without formal driver education.

The belief of experts is that training combined with a graduated licensing system is the safest way to introduce teens to various driving conditions.

The first model for teen graduated licensing was developed more than 20 years ago by the NHTSA. The NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators are pushing for entry-level staged licensing and education in all 50 states. ❀

Where to find information

House Public Information Office

175 State Office Building
(612) 296-2146 or 1-800-657-3550

The House Public Information Office is a nonpartisan office that provides: committee meeting schedules; legislator information; and publications, including the *Session Weekly* news magazine, educational brochures for all ages, and member directories. All information is available at no charge.

Most of what this office publishes can be viewed on the Legislature's World Wide Web page. To connect, point your web browser at: <http://www.leg.state.mn.us>



Vellenga maintains former goals in 'Children's Initiative' position

By Jim Thielman

In former Rep. Kathleen Vellenga's mind, there is rarely anything bad about a good argument. That's certainly one thing she misses since she left the House in 1994.

"Having something to say and standing up on the floor of the House and saying it, that's one thing I really miss," she said in a recent interview.

On the other hand, Vellenga's career as project coordinator of the St. Paul/Ramsey County Children's Initiative has its advantages.

"I don't wake up in the middle of the night as much. I don't feel like the whole state's watching me," she said.

A Macalester graduate in education, she taught school and volunteered in child-abuse prevention programs before she sought political office.

When voters in Vellenga's St. Paul district approached her about running for state representative in 1980, her thought was that she was just a normal person.

"After I got over to the House, I realized everyone was," she said.

Vellenga was just a kid from Nebraska, but her uncle Tom Osborne was a state senator there. (The senator's son and Vellenga's cousin was the Tom Osborne who retired this year after 25 seasons as head football coach at the University of Nebraska.)

When first elected, Vellenga set her goal at three terms in the Minnesota House at a time when women were a small minority in the House. The DFLer never expected leadership roles would follow.

However, during her seven terms as a lawmaker, Vellenga chaired the House

Education Finance Committee and the House Judiciary Committee.

When Rep. Dee Long (DFL-Mpls) stepped down as House speaker in 1993, Vellenga's name was mentioned as a potential successor.

"I knew I did not want to do that," Vellenga said. "Sure, it would be fun up there running the floor sessions and, sure, it would be fun to be that influential on issues. But you've got to be out there campaigning for 134 House seats, because you've got to keep that majority.

"I wasn't going to do that. I never even liked my own campaigns."

She says her most important legislative work was "synthesizing the message that we wanted to spend one dollar on prevention for every dollar we spent on corrections. We know the first three years in a



Former Rep. Kathleen Vellenga, who was once a teacher, now works as project coordinator of the St. Paul/Ramsey County Children's Initiative.

child's life are the most important, and we wanted to get that message out."

Now, she pursues that social goal at another level.

In hindsight, Vellenga said she "was getting cynical [in the House]. It was time to go." But she believes her years in the House gave her a breadth of knowledge that makes it easier to do her current work. ❀