

I have been asked to address my opinions regarding the issue of senior driving and the role of the Maryland MVA in improving the screening of potential age related driving concerns. My career background is that I am an occupational therapist with 42 years of experience. I am also a certified driving rehabilitation specialist with 27 years of full time work, evaluating individuals with any type of medical issue to determine driving safety. The diagnoses are varied from dementia, strokes, diabetes, parkinson's disease, and often "senior driving concerns". The majority of my clients are 75 years and older. My evaluation of each pt involves a clinic assessment which various tests are administered to assess vision, cognition, motor function, reaction time, the ability to rapidly process information. The second part of the assessment is a behind the wheel evaluation where a 15- 20 mile road assessment is performed. Often families and health care professionals contact our department to set up appointments for a professional driving evaluation due to safety concerns in this age range. Statistics do indicate that as we age often many of the vital skills required to drive are changing.

According to the Governors Highway Safety Administration, impairments in three key areas—vision, cognition and motor function—are responsible for higher crash rates for older drivers. Vision declines with age; cognition, which includes memory and attention, can be impacted by medical problems such as dementia and medication side effects; and motor function suffers as flexibility declines due to diseases such as arthritis. There often is a variety of other common healthcare issues such as diabetes, strokes, cardiac problems. Many states routinely attempt to identify, assess and regulate older drivers with diminishing abilities who cannot or will not voluntarily modify their driving habits. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 18 states require older drivers to renew their drivers licenses more often than the rest of the state's residents. In addition, 18 states require more frequent vision tests for older motorists. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia prohibit older drivers from renewing licenses by mail or online. One state, Illinois, requires older drivers age 75 and over to take a road test at renewal and the District of Columbia requires a doctor's approval for drivers over the age of 70 to renew their licenses.

Although I do personally do not judge a person's driving capability on age, there is frequently a direct correlation on a person's aging functional changes and their safe driving skills. From my many years of working in driving evaluation, I can personally attest that there are frequently serious problems observed in the clinic and the road portion of the driving evaluation process with driver's in the 80+ age range. It is the responsibility of the Motor Vehicle Administration to attempt to monitor driver's and their potential harm to the general population. My personal experience is that most drivers go unmonitored by their doctors, the individual's personal insight regarding their skills is poor, and families have a very difficult time becoming involved in the issue. Maryland's renewal time frame, which could be up to 8 years, is not capturing the potential unsafe drivers in the age range where many changes occur. Frequent personal face to face renewal, where potential problems could be identified, or a brief physician "physical" review (like the one's that eye Dr submit for vision) would certainly help to capture drivers who are at risk. I would certainly see this as a measure to save lives- the individual, their passengers, and innocent others who are at the effect of an accident/incident. This legislation has been a long time coming to attempt to screen, in some manner the "at risk" senior driver.

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