

From: Chris Dimanin cdimanin@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Ethics & Oversight Committee
Date: Jan 16, 2024 at 9:04:35 PM
To: Rep. Erin Byrnes (District 15) ErinByrnes@house.mi.gov

Sent from my iPad

On Jan 16, 2024, at 5:02 PM, Rep. Erin Byrnes (District 15) <ErinByrnes@house.mi.gov> wrote:

Hi Chris,

Thank you for reaching out to our office with these concerns. We take all oversight requests seriously and appreciate you bringing this to her attention. I will share this with Rep. Byrnes for her review and will contact you if she has any questions. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Jose Ventura
Constituent Services Director
Office of Representative Erin Byrnes
House District 15 | O: [\(517\) 373-0847](tel:(517)373-0847)

From: Chris Dimanin <cdimanin@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 10:42 AM
To: Rep. Erin Byrnes (District 15) <ErinByrnes@house.mi.gov>; Chris Dimanin <cdimanin@gmail.com>
Subject: Ethics & Oversight Committee

Dear Representative Byrnes,

I write to you today in the hope that you may provide me with some advice and direction. Please review the attached letter that was sent to Senator Polehanki who chairs the Senate Education Committee. This letter will give you the essence of what my concerns are relative to your involvement with your committee. As a career long high school counselor in Michigan, I'm very much aware of the importance of having in place a quality oversight of all the areas of government services. In particular, I'm very sensitive to those areas that are directly connected to the safety and education of our students. As a result of my concerns, I have been actively involved with management of the MDOS Driver Education and Testing

Department.

Briefly put, as a 30 year veteran MI high school counselor, including 25 years as a driver education instructor, and currently having ownership of a state certified driver testing business, the oversight of this critical area is very poor. Poorly supported by lack of staff needs, lack of financial support, and lack of attention to the safety concerns for the welfare of our kids. It's as if we are desensitized about our kids driving a car safely, since we do it everyday.

You may ask, "Why contact my office?" I've sent countless voice mail messages, emails, and even snail mail letters to Senator Polehanki's office since October 14, 2023. To date I have not received a single reply from any of my attempts.

Maybe, you can help?

Respectfully,

Chris Dimanin
cdimanin@gmail.com
[734-536-0409](tel:734-536-0409)

Sent from my iPad

Dec. 4, 2023

Dear Senator Polehanki,

Hopefully, you have had a chance to review the email I addressed to you on Oct. 14, 2023. Please allow me to summarize that message. I have been a career long Michigan public school high school counselor for 30 years. My additional educational duties have included teaching driver education to our teens, both classroom and behind-the-wheel. I've also worked with families as a fully licensed mental health counselor here in Michigan. For the last 26 years I have acted as an independent contractor for the MDOS as the owner and examiner of a state driver testing business. To date I have administered over 12,000 driving tests.

During this extended period of time, I have had countless interactions within the MDOS, specifically the Driver Testing Unit. Over these years the MDOS staff that I have engaged with have been very professional and caring regarding my concerns with our teens driving safe. I am especially happy to have nothing but positive experiences with the current Manager, of both Driver Education and Driver Testing, Virginia Henry, and Senior Driver Testing Analyst, Khaili Meyers. They have always been willing to assist in any of a variety of issues.

But more to the core of what message I want to share with you is how overwhelmingly burdened this staff is with responsibilities. This can easily be attributed by the lack of funding for additional staffing. Something as critical as assuring the safety of Michigan's driving community, has been minimized. Experienced drivers have been desensitized about driving safe because we drive everyday. However, as I see it, teens are not experienced drivers. There needs to be a better focus of our concerns for their safety. Any survey or study that has been done, clearly illustrates that the top 3 causes of death for the age group 14 to 23 is traffic accidents, firearm related death, and suicide. Typically, traffic accidents is the leading cause. Allow me share some details that will clearly show the extend of the lack of focus that exists on traffic safety. These figures are verifiable with the MDOS.

Since 2020, the Driver Education and Testing Section was reduced to 2 work units: Driver Education Unit and Driver Testing Unit. Because of the lack of adequate staffing, this unit reduction only resulted in more work and responsibilities for the already meager number of staff giving the charge of overseeing these units. Please understand that the following numbers are STATE-WIDE:

The Driver Education Unit consists of 4 analysts: 1 analyst is responsible for internal support and 3 analysts are responsible for every driver education provider, instructor, and driver education classroom in the ENTIRE STATE. They also have to review and process every new driver education instructor application as well as renewals, conduct training for providers, investigate complaints, conduct pre-approval inspections of new driver education providers, conduct observations of instructors, inspect driver education ranges, conduct business inspections and investigations (which require a great deal of time). Staff may also be participants in internal work groups outside of the position description duties or serve on various interview panels which require time away from duties.

With this description in hand, please note the following staffing numbers that are responsible for the oversight of the entire program (STATE-WIDE):

How many Driver Testing Businesses: 101

How many Driver Testing Examiners: 356

How many Driver Education Schools: 281

How many Driver Education Instructors: 1,861

The Driver Testing Unit consists of 6 analysts: 1 analyst is responsible for internal support and 5 analysts are responsible for every driver testing business, examiner, and test site in the ENTIRE STATE. They have to conduct business inspections, conduct examiner training for 3 test disciplines: auto, CDL, and motorcycle. They have to conduct inspections of test sites. They have to conduct overt and covert observations as required by state and federal laws. The analysts also investigate all complaints and allegations of improper and/or fraudulent testing. The analysts additionally have to review all new business and/or examiner proposals. Staff may also be participants in internal work groups outside of the position duties or serve on various interview panels which require time away from duties.

So you can see, there are a total of 10 analysts covering these duties for the entire state. This total would still not do justice to properly oversee the program in Metro-Detroit alone.

Those of us that care about the importance of driver safety should be stunned and embarrassed to learn about the lack resources targeted for these programs. As an educator associated with this program, I'm beyond being embarrassed.

I'll close with the following. For over 2 decades I have been given the task of helping to implement this very critical skill set.....safe driving. I've limited my comments to lack of staffing and resources to explain the burdens placed on the shoulders of the existing staff. The lack of appropriate staffing can lead to less than effective oversight of the 2,600 driver education schools, driver testing businesses, driver education instructors, and driver testing examiners. Ten analysts. You can't make this up.

How many analysts are covering all of their responsibilities for the driver education schools and driver testing businesses in the upper peninsula? The geographic coverage issue is like a "DO NOT ENTER " sign. No analysts live in the upper peninsula. So who is watching the store?

My years of involvement has come across countless examples of cheating by driver education owners, driver testing business owners, instructors, and examiners. Given the opportunity to cheat, cut corners, and charge outrageous fees is wide spread. I have been witness to those that are tempted to do so, since they know no one is watching.

The Driver Education Provider Instructor Act needs to be updated to more accurately include not only criminal/felony type acts by instructors, but also a wide range of inappropriate behaviors by instructors. For example, DEPIA would not and has not been able to act on those instructors that would make sexually suggestive comments to students while in the car for behind-the wheel instruction. Parents have contacted MDOS to report such behavior. These behaviors have also included other student witnesses. Because of the current language of DEPIA...nothing could be done. Driver education instructors have unique access to their students. Please see: www.rain.org/news/grooming-know-warning-signs. Driver education instructors have one of the best accesses to students compared to most other professions. They can utilize the 5 steps listed in "grooming."

Please feel free to contact me. I'm available to meet with you in person in Lansing at any time. If by chance you feel limited to help me in solving these issues, please direct me to someone who may. It took 6 weeks to have Madison pick up my call. A more timely response would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,
Chris Dimanin
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