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CHARLOTTE ESAU
14TH DISTRICT

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

Chairman Proehl, Vice Chairman Delperdang, Ranking Member Helgerson, members of the Committee,

Thank you for considering, and for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of, HB 2609.

This bill is a result of a friend contacting me one evening a couple of weeks ago, asking how we could get the law changed so a 15-year-old with a learner's permit could drive to church on their own, just as they can drive to school or work. He made a some very good points as to why this should be and as he's testifying today, I won't duplicate that by sharing it myself.

What I would like to share is the reaction I got from fellow legislators as I mentioned the bill I was working on. Member after member said, "of course that should be allowed" or "I thought it was already legal." Others shared how this was a burden in their family when they had young learning drivers at home. I quickly realized this issue crosses ideological and partisan lines and decided to make it a co-sponsored bill. We faced a short deadline and still had tremendous numbers co-sponsor. The right to gather for religious expression is certainly one we don't want to inhibit. The good that comes from our youth attending worship or religious education is at least of equal value than what they learn at school or the experiences they gain from employment. I am encouraged that so many quickly agreed.

One question that I've fielded a few times is what does this cover? There is definition in statute as to what constitutes "religious worship service held by a religious organization" and my understanding is this does cover such things as a weekly Bible study or youth group meeting. I wanted to be sure of that myself as my intention with this legislation is to allow for driving to those types of gatherings.

Again, thank you for taking the time to consider this legislation and I am happy to stand for any questions.

Rep. Charlotte Esau

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