

I am writing to you as an anguished and mournful mother of a North Dakota son who was killed in Minot, on May 20th this year.

My son is Michael Fenner. He was barely just 18 years old, and 36 hours away from walking across a stage to get his high school diploma from Minot High School.

He never had the chance to enjoy that accomplishment, an accomplishment that all kids his age so look forward to. That moment was taken from him that night when a 16 year old boy, driving with his girlfriend in his parents pickup truck, ran my son over right on Broadway at approximately 10:30 pm.

My son never stood a chance of surviving. The doctors told me that had my son sustained those same injuries while in an operating room, he still would not have been able to survive.

In many states, children the age of 15 to 16 get permits and licenses to drive, but in most states, there are restrictions on these young drivers. Restrictions that limit how late in the evening anyone under the age of 18 can legally operate a vehicle. Restrictions that do not allow a young driver, under the age of 18, to operate a vehicle with any other children under the age of 18 in the vehicle.

The child that killed my son is just 16 years old. Per his own words at the police department, this child woke up at sunrise, worked at his parent's farm the entire day, rolling soy bean. He then drove his girlfriend who had been helping him, home, drove to town to his grandparent's property to mow their grass. He drove home, showered, drove back into town, picked up his girlfriend, drove to the local Menards, purchased items his grandfather needed, dropped those off and then he and his girlfriend drove around, hung out at a park, and then headed home. At that moment, he killed my child. This 16 year old child had been up working and running errands, without any rest, for 17 hours straight at the moment he killed my son.

He knew he had run over a person, as he called the police multiple times that night, but not to report what he had done or turn himself in. He simply drove to a park, hung out with friends and went home to sleep in his bed that night. Only after multiple pictures of his pickup truck appeared on the news and social media, did he finally turn himself in, 2 days later.

He is being charged as a juvenile, and the case will work through the court process, but nothing that happens there will ever bring my son back to me.

I implore you, and the state of North Dakota, to add restrictions to youthful drivers under the age of 18, like most states do. Children, and they are children, have not developed in their brains enough to understand the gravity of having a weapon of such weight and sheer force, in their hands. They do not comprehend that something as simple as being distracted, even for a moment, can cause the death of another human being.

With the technology at their fingertips, it's even more imperative that we limit our children's exposure to distractions while behind the wheel of a car or truck. I fully understand that children that live on farms, which this child does, assist and operate some heavy equipment on their parents farms, however, please think seriously about what that entails. An operator of a vehicle on a farm with 100's or even 1,000's of acres to drive across, being distracted won't do much damage at all. If you think it through, these kids are even more prone to not being able to comprehend the seriousness of their actions and decisions while driving on a city street compared to an open field with nothing to collide with.

I will never get my son back, I lost my heart and soul when he was killed that night. I can't breathe when I think about this, which is most of my days right now. I don't think adding some reasonable restrictions to a child's privilege to drive a motor vehicle, weighing 1,000's of pounds, is a hard decision to make. We need to protect our children who are driving, and those citizens that have to share the road with these children.

I don't feel it is unreasonable to expect our children, who are not yet 18, not be permitted to be cruising around town at all hours of the night, parents can take their children to and/or from locations if it's past 8pm. I don't feel it is unreasonable to keep our children from as many distractions as possible, such as other teenagers being in a car, which is nothing but a distraction. I have been driving for about 30 years now, and when my boys were 16 and in my car, it was non-stop distractions with the music and noise, cell phones, tablets and everything that comes with teenagers. I have the ability to understand those distractions as an adult who has many years of driving and a full understanding of how dangerous distracted driving is. We owe our children these restrictions to keep them safe. They need us to give them the time to mature and learn to respect the sheer weight of these vehicles. We are failing them if we do otherwise.

How many more children need to die or be seriously injured due to the lack of restrictions on youthful drivers?

I am begging you and anyone that needs to hear this story, to add these minor restrictions to our youthful drivers for their safety and the safety of everyone on the road.

Please do not let my son, Michael, die for nothing. If his death prompts changes to these driving rules and it saves a single child from the same fate, another mother from having her heart ripped out of her with grief, then at least there is a small piece of meaning behind his untimely and horrific death.

I kindly ask you to consider this matter seriously and make some simple, small changes to save any other families from the same fate as ours.

Sincerely,

A grieving mother.
Nancy L Cena