DRIVE-Safe Act: Reducing the Age to Transport Goods Between States

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Recently, two United States senators proposed the Developing Responsible Individuals for a Vibrant Economy (DRIVE-Safe) Act in an effort to address a perceived truck driver shortage and increase job opportunities for young people. This bipartisan bill would create an apprenticeship program that would permit CDL holders under the age of 21 to operate a commercial vehicle in interstate commerce. In doing so, it would bypass the federal ban on truck drivers under the age of 21 operating a truck across state lines.

The program would have two steps. First, to qualify for the apprenticeship program, individuals would need to complete 400 hours of added training. Once they qualified, participants would drive with an experienced driver accompanying them. They would only be permitted to drive trucks containing the most advanced safety technology available.

Currently, 49 states and the District of Columbia allow drivers to obtain their CDL when they turn 18. Senator Todd Young, a Republican senator from Indiana and one of the legislators who introduced the bill, believes federal law should align itself with the majority states rules. He stated, “Today, 18-year-olds can drive more than 200 miles from New Albany to Gary and back, but they aren't allowed to drive two miles from New Albany to Louisville … The DRIVE-Safe Act will eliminate this ridiculous regulation.” Senator Joe Manchin, a Democrat from West Virginia who co-sponsored the bill, echoed this sentiment about the current system by saying, “In West Virginia, that means someone can drive 5 hours from Beckley to Weirton, but can't drive another 15 minutes over the river to Steubenville.”

The proposal has received some approval within the trucking industry. The president and CEO of the American Trucking Associations indicated his support for the proposal by explaining, “This is a common-sense proposal that will open enormous opportunities for the 18-21 year-old population, giving them access to a high-paying profession free of the debt burden that comes with a four-year degree … Moreover, this bill would strengthen training programs beyond current requirements to ensure safety and that drivers are best prepared.”

However, others in the industry have cited safety concerns in opposing the legislation. A group that includes the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association and Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety has stated, “Studies of young CMV drivers show that as the age of the driver decreases, large truck fatal crash involvement rates increase.” Additionally, the group cited public opinion polls that showed that “73% of the public opposed allowing teen truck and bus drivers to operate a CMV in interstate commerce.”

The future of this legislation is far from certain. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg indicated in June that it is something he would consider if safety concerns were adequately addressed. For now, the bill remains in the Senate. MG+M will monitor the progress of the legislation and its impacts on trucking companies across the country.

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