



Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association

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February 27, 2019

Dear Member of Congress:

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA), which represents more than 160,000 owner-operators and professional truck drivers, strongly opposes efforts to lower the minimum age requirement for truckers engaged in interstate commerce. The DRIVE-Safe Act presents obvious safety concerns for the new truck drivers it hopes to attract, as well as the traveling public who would share the road with them. Younger drivers – especially teenagers – generally lack the maturity and experience to operate a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) at the safest levels. Research consistently concludes that CMV drivers under the age of 21 are more likely to be involved in crashes. In some states, teenagers entering the apprentice program created by the legislation would have only recently received a full driver's license to operate an automobile, let alone a CMV.

While these clear safety implications alone should dissuade elected officials from lowering minimum age requirements, professional drivers understand there are long-standing problems within the trucking industry that such a change would only worsen. For decades, our country's largest motor carriers and the trade associations in DC that represent them have touted the myth of a driver shortage as a means to promote policies designed to maintain the cheapest labor supply possible. Over the same period, driver compensation has remained relatively stagnant, failing to increase at a rate that keeps pace with inflation. Experience tells us many of those entities pushing for a change in the current minimum age requirement would simply use it to take advantage of a new pool of drivers – teenagers, who would be subjected to poor working conditions, predatory lease-to-own schemes and woefully inadequate compensation.

Rather than developing legislation to allow more teenagers behind the wheel of 80,000 pound trucks, Congress should be taking steps to reverse the incessantly high driver turnover rate, which remains above 90% among large truckload carriers. This perpetual driver churn decreases safety, as those who leave the workforce are immediately replaced with less experienced individuals in an effort to keep labor costs as low as possible and avoid improving difficult working conditions. Without addressing the underlying circumstances that have led to excessive churn, we anticipate turnover rates will remain precariously high or even increase – no matter the age of the driver.

Though allowing CDL holders under the age of 21 to engage in interstate commerce is unlikely to reduce driver turnover or improve safety, we appreciate the DRIVE-Safe Act's approach to robust new entrant training. Aspects of the minimum standards included in the legislation, especially 240 hours of mandatory behind-the-wheel experience, are a good starting point for enhancing federal training requirements for current entry-level drivers, regardless of age. Ensuring properly trained drivers are entering the workforce is paramount to improving highway safety and reducing crashes. It will also help ensure those beginning a career in trucking are better prepared for the challenges and demands of the profession, which is another critical element to reducing turnover rates. However, we are greatly concerned about provisions within the bill that permit drivers as young as 21 to become qualified trainers. This approach is dangerously insufficient. Only the most experienced truckers with a thorough history of safe driving should be permitted to train anyone getting behind the wheel of a CMV for the first time.

OOIDA is eager to work with elected officials on legislation that helps make trucking a viable and sustainable career choice for Americans who are prepared to enter the driver workforce. However, we will continue to oppose bills like the DRIVE-Safe Act that jeopardize driver and highway safety in an effort to provide corporate motor carriers the cheap labor they crave.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Spencer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Todd Spencer
President & CEO
Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, Inc.