

SB566 - Maryland Motor Truck Association - Support

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Position: FAV



Maryland Motor Truck Association

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HEARING DATE: February 14, 2024

BILL NO/TITLE: **Senate Bill 566 – Education - Transporting Students and Jobs That Require Driving - Authorization and Requirements (Drivers Education for Good Jobs Act of 2024)**

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: **Support**

Maryland Motor Truck Association offers its support for SB566, which would require the creation of a statewide career and technical education pathway for high school students to prepare for a career that requires driving skills and a driver's license.

The trucking industry is suffering from a massive labor shortage of drivers. National data from the American Trucking Associations indicates the current shortfall is roughly 80,000 drivers. Virtually every company that operates commercial trucks needs more drivers.

The lack of drivers has impaired an already fragile supply chain. Maryland's transportation system is the backbone of its commercial activity, with trucks providing the integral link for the state's rail system, the Thurgood Marshall BWI Airport, and the Port of Baltimore. Trucks are the hub of Maryland's distribution wheel, playing a vital role in the state's economic development as they safely and efficiently support the state's manufacturing, agricultural, and retail industries. Over 92 percent of Maryland's communities are served exclusively by truck, meaning that is the only way they get their goods. Without truck drivers, America's economy stops.

For many years, attracting younger drivers to the trucking industry was nearly impossible due to Federal age limits preventing 18-to-20 year-olds from hauling interstate freight. While all 50 states allow 18-year-olds to obtain a commercial driver's license, the Federal ban meant an 18-year-old adult could drive from Sacramento, California to San Diego, California (547 miles) or El Paso, Texas to Houston, Texas (744 miles) without issue, but could not drive along I-81 from Hagerstown, Maryland to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania (23 miles). This is extremely problematic for smaller states, or those whose major population centers and commerce routes are near the state's borders. However, the passage of the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act included a pilot program to allow 3,000 younger adult drivers between ages 18 to 20 with a CDL to cross state lines after receiving additional training and if using vehicles equipped with extra safety technologies. There are also local driving jobs that operate entirely in Maryland in industries like construction.

Williamsport High School in Washington County has become the first program in Maryland to enroll seniors in courses that will prepare them to take a commercial learners permit test. These students can then feed directly into the CDL training program at Hagerstown Community College. This should be occurring in counties across the state. The path to the middle class is changing. According to the American Transportation Research Institute, the average wage for a heavy-truck driver is approximately \$70,000 per year. For many commercial drivers a six-figure income is possible. There are vital industries in today's economy that offer opportunities for steady, good-paying jobs without the financial burden of a college degree. Trucking is one of those. MMTA believes the passage of SB566 will help promote driving as a career and encourages the Committee to offer a favorable report.

About Maryland Motor Truck Association: Maryland Motor Truck Association is a non-profit trade association that has represented the trucking industry since 1935. In service to its 1,000 members, MMTA is committed to support, advocate and educate for a safe, efficient and profitable trucking industry in Maryland.

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SB 566.Drivers Education for Good Jobs Act.pdf

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Position: FWA

BILL: Senate Bill 566
TITLE: Education – Transporting Students and Jobs That Require Driving – Authorization and Requirements (Drivers Education for Good Jobs Act of 2024)
DATE: February 14, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 566 to establish a statewide program to provide career and technical education (CTE) for students choosing to pursue careers as drivers of commercial vehicles, including school buses. MABE appreciates that this bill would authorize each local school system to determine whether to allow individuals who have completed the pertinent training and certification and who are at least 19 and a half years of age to be hired as school bus drivers. School systems are experiencing critical shortages of all categories of school employees, and this legislative initiative would open an avenue for students, school systems, and bus contractors to fill much needed school bus driver positions.

A hiring priority among the many challenges facing school systems is the critical need to recruit and retain qualified school bus drivers. To be clear, local school systems in accordance with state law and regulations place a high priority on assuring the qualifications of school bus drivers. These go beyond the commercial driver’s license (CDL) requirements to include pre-service and in-service training, criminal history standards, and alcohol and controlled substances testing (COMAR 13A.06.07). However, such standards unavoidably create additional barriers to otherwise qualified CDL drivers. More importantly, qualified CDL drivers and certified bus drivers are generally benefitting from the highly competitive compensation offered by other employers. Again, MABE supports a multifaceted approach to addressing these school bus driver issues while maintaining high driver qualification standards which we firmly believe are in the best interests of students and drivers.

In Maryland, school systems typically have a blend of owned buses driven by school system employees and contracted buses driven by the employees of those contractors. For contractors and school systems alike, qualified bus drivers are in limited supply, and many drivers are raising concerns about health, safety, student behavior, and compensation issues. Local school systems, in partnership with local governments, are taking steps to address these concerns. MABE greatly appreciates the efforts of local governments to provide additional funding and the State efforts to recruit CDL drivers to apply for bus driver jobs.

MABE represents 24 local boards of education with a unified commitment to ensuring student safety in all school-related activities, and especially school bus safety. School bus safety involves a wide array of activities: bus driver training, providing safe bus stops, maximizing student safety through the use of security cameras on buses, enforcing traffic laws for reckless drivers who illegally pass buses, and the design and construction standards of the buses themselves. In these ways local school systems, bus contractors, and local law enforcement agencies work to ensure the safest possible transport of students to and from school.

State regulations provide that each local school system is responsible for the safe operation of their student transportation system, must comply with all state procedures and guidelines, and may adopt policies and procedures which exceed the state's minimum requirements (COMAR 13A.06.07.03). With regard to local administration and operation of the student transportation system, state regulations require that each local system employ a local supervisor of student transportation, and prescribe numerous operational and reporting requirements for the hiring of school vehicle driving instructors, employment qualifications for bus drivers, bus inspections, and routing and scheduling.

State law authorizes the State Board to "adopt rules and regulations that provide for the safe operation of the student transportation system of each county board of education." Pursuant to Section 5-205, the State Board has adopted regulations under COMAR 13A.06.07. The State Board's regulations incorporate by reference several federal regulations regarding bus driver qualifications, as well as cross-referencing numerous provisions of Maryland transportation laws and regulations regarding school vehicles and drivers. The Transportation Article also includes provisions regarding school buses, including definitions, operating standards, and driver qualifications (e.g. Md. Code Ann., Transp. Art. § 11-173, school vehicle definitions; § 16-816, bus driver qualifications; and § 21-1118, bus driver responsibilities).

MABE believes that Maryland's regimen of student transportation standards reflects the State's strong interest in ensuring student safety and the federal government's corresponding regulation of commercial transportation including school vehicles. On the local level, school systems must not only comply with all state and federal safety requirements, but also adopt bus routes, stops, loading zones, and schedules. In this way student transportation presents local school systems with myriad, daily operational challenges.

Regarding Senate Bill 566, MABE is concerned with the prescriptive nature of the mandated career pathway to be established by the new CTE Committee established by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act. Specifically, MABE requests the removal of the last provision of the bill which requires annual goals for the numbers of students obtaining a CDL and bus driver's certification before graduating from high school.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 566 with the amendment described above.

