



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

March 27, 2023

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Chairwoman
The Honorable Robert C. Scott, Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

As you prepare for tomorrow's hearing, "Unleashing America's Opportunities for Hiring and Employment," Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) urges you to prioritize safety in policies and legislation involving those who work and travel on our Nation's roads. We respectfully request this letter be included in the hearing record.

In 2021, over 5,600 people were killed in crashes involving a large truck.¹ Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck crashes has increased by 66 percent.² Additionally, nearly 147,000 people were injured in crashes involving a large truck in 2020.³ New data finds that in the first six months of 2022, traffic fatalities in crashes involving at least one large truck are up 10 percent; 2,811 people were killed.⁴ The cost to society from crashes involving large trucks and buses was estimated to be \$143 billion in 2019, the latest year for which data is available.⁵ When adjusted solely for inflation, this figure amounts to over \$156 billion.⁶

Permitting Teen Truckers to Operate in Interstate Commerce Will Not Solve the Trucking Industry's Longstanding Workforce Issues

Issues involving the Nation's supply chain have highlighted problems that members of the trucking industry have not effectively addressed for decades including high turnover rates for drivers and poor working conditions. Certain segments of the trucking industry have been pushing to allow teenagers to operate commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) in interstate commerce for at least 20 years, often relying

¹ Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats; Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2021, NHTSA, May 2022, DOT HS 813 298.

² *Id.* and Traffic Safety Facts 2019: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data, NHTSA, Aug. 2021, DOT HS 813 141. Note, the 66 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2021. However, between 2015 and 2016 there was a change in data collection at U.S. DOT that could affect this calculation. From 2009 to 2015 the number of fatalities in truck involved crashes increased by 21 percent and between 2016 to 2021, it increased by 20 percent.

³ Traffic Safety Facts, 2020 Data: Large Trucks, NHTSA, Apr. 2022, DOT HS 813 286.

⁴ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, December). *Early estimates of motor vehicle traffic fatalities and fatality rate by sub-categories through June 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 405). NHTSA.

⁵ 2022 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics, FMCSA, Dec. 2022, RRA-22-007.

⁶ CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, available at https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

on their own forecasts for the number of drivers needed as a rationale. These projections have consistently failed to materialize.⁷

The trucking industry continues to face a driver retention crisis, not a driver shortage. In fact, a March 2019 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) analysis found that “the labor market for truck drivers works about as well as the labor markets for other blue-collar occupations” and “a deeper look [at the truck industry labor market] does not find evidence of a secular shortage.”⁸ Rather, industry data shows driver turnover at some carriers is near 90 percent.⁹ As U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Pete Buttigieg noted, such a high rate of turnover is indicative that there are some real issues with the quality of the job of driving a truck.¹⁰ In addition, states issue more than 450,000 new commercial driver licenses (CDLs) each year demonstrating that there are candidates to fill vacancies.¹¹ Instead of proposing initiatives that will degrade public safety, the industry should be focused on addressing the retention issues through improved, safe working conditions.

Younger drivers are demonstrated to be less safe. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), citing numerous studies, has stated that “age is a strong risk factor for truck crash involvement.”¹² In fact, age is the most important factor in the high rate of involvement of younger CMV drivers in fatal crashes. The general pattern of over-involvement in fatal crashes for younger CMV drivers dominates all other factors. Studies of young CMV drivers show that as the age of the driver decreases, large truck fatal crash involvement rates increase.¹³

CMV drivers under the age of 19 are four times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes, as compared to CMV drivers who are 21 years of age and older, and CMV drivers ages 19-20 are six times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes (compared to CMV drivers 21 years and older).¹⁴ This plain-truth reality is not surprising. Generally, younger drivers are more likely to be involved in fatal crashes because they lack driving experience and skills and tend to take greater risks. Development of the brain region vital to decision making and complex tasks, specifically the pre-frontal cortex, may not be fully reached until one’s mid-20s.¹⁵ While proponents of younger truck drivers have justified this misguided policy proposal by citing state laws that allow them to operate intrastate, expanding the operations of these dangerous drivers extends existing safety problems while introducing additional safety considerations such as unfamiliar terrain and weather conditions.

⁷ FMCSA Document ID: 2000-84100-0782. American Trucking Associations, Truck Driver Shortage Analysis 2015 (Oct. 2015).

⁸ United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Is the U.S. labor market for truck drivers broken? (Mar. 2019).

⁹ American Trucking Associations, Fourth Quarter Truck Driver Turnover Rate Shows Muddled Picture (Mar. 12, 2021).

¹⁰ See: <https://www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/watch/transportation-secretary-buttigieg-on-supply-chain-issues-worker-shortage-125851717987> (Nov. 10, 2021).

¹¹ Greg Rosalsky, Is There Really A Truck Driver Shortage?, National Public Radio (May 25, 2021).

¹² Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Comments to the docket, FMCSA-2000-8410-0515; citing Christie, R. and Fabre, J. 1999. Potential for fast-tracking heavy vehicle drivers. Melbourne, Australia: National Road Transport Commission; Blower, D. 1996. The accident experience of younger truck drivers. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute; Frith, W.J. 1994. A case-control study of heavy vehicle drivers’ working time and safety. *Proceedings of the 17th Australian Road Research Board Conference*, 17-30. Queensland, Australia: Australian Road Research Board; Stein, H.S. and Jones, I.S. (1988).

¹³ Campbell, K. L., *Fatal Accident Involvement Rates By Driver Age For Large Trucks*, *Accid. Anal. & Prev.* Vol 23, No. 4, pp. 287-295 (1991).

¹⁴ Campbell, K. L., *Fatal Accident Involvement Rates By Driver Age For Large Trucks*, *Accid. Anal. & Prev.* Vol 23, No. 4, pp. 287-295 (1991).

¹⁵ Arian, M, et al., Maturation of the adolescent brain, *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* (Apr. 3, 2013).

Diverse stakeholders including safety groups, law enforcement, public health and consumer organizations, truck drivers, labor unions, some trucking companies, and truck crash victims and survivors have repeatedly opposed efforts to lower the age to operate CMVs in interstate commerce. Additionally, the public has rejected lowering the minimum age for interstate truck and bus drivers with 62 percent of respondents in opposition, according to a 2020 public opinion poll conducted by Engine’s Caravan Survey.¹⁶ Furthermore, in 2001, a petition was filed with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to lower the age at which a person could obtain a CDL to operate in interstate commerce from 21 to 18 as part of a pilot program. The FMCSA declined to lower the minimum age for an unrestricted CDL because the agency could not conclude that the safety performance of younger drivers was on par with, or even close to, that of older CMV drivers. In comments to the docket for the petition, the public strongly rejected the idea with 96 percent of individuals who responded opposing the proposal along with 88 percent of the truck drivers and 86 percent of the motor carriers.¹⁷

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) enacted in November 2021 included a provision requiring the establishment of a pilot program to permit teen truckers to operate in interstate commerce.¹⁸ This imprudent initiative could have a negative, long-lasting and far-reaching impact on public health, even more so if not executed with needed safeguards. This program is basically a “science experiment” with all road users serving unknowingly as “test subjects.” If accepted research protocols are not followed by FMCSA, it could result in preventable deaths and injuries and will also jeopardize the legitimacy of the outcomes of the program. Therefore, while Advocates does not support this misguided program, the commonsense safeguards implemented by FMCSA including requiring carriers to register with U.S. Department of Labor. Lastly, the agency’s recommendations and conclusions in the required report to Congress must be supported by sufficient evidence and data collected during the program.

Allowing teenagers to drive trucks in interstate commerce will worsen and expand the major problems with truck driver working conditions from inside state lines to throughout the entire Nation. Improving working conditions to ensure experienced drivers are safer, rather than tapping into an unsafe pool of teenage drivers to fill the void, will ideally lead to healthier and more fulfilled drivers who stay in their jobs as well as attracting new applicants.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase, President

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee Education and the Workforce

¹⁶ Engine’s Caravan Survey Public Opinion Poll (2020).

¹⁷ Young Commercial Driver Pilot Training Program, Notice of denial of petition to initiate a pilot program, 68 FR 34467, 34469 (June 9, 2003).

¹⁸ Pub. L. 117-58, § 23022 (2021).