

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5251

As of January 19, 2023

Title: An act relating to streamlining the licensing process for a commercial driver's license by allowing the department to waive requirements for applicants that previously surrendered the license, allowing the license to be renewed online, and modifying the license test fees.

Brief Description: Streamlining the licensing process for a commercial driver's license by allowing the department to waive requirements for applicants that previously surrendered the license, allowing the license to be renewed online, and modifying the license test fees.

Sponsors: Senators Valdez, Boehnke, Kuderer, Lias, Mullet, Nobles, Saldaña, Shewmake, Torres and Wilson, C.; by request of Department of Licensing.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/19/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Reduces the fee charged by the Department of Licensing (DOL) for a skills examination for a commercial motor vehicle license and lowers the number of attempts to pass the examination for the payment of each fee from two to one.
- Removes the requirement that an applicant for the renewal of a commercial driver's license apply in person at a licensing service office.
- Provides DOL authority to waive commercial driver's license or commercial learner's permit qualification standards for applicants who previously have voluntarily surrendered a commercial driver's license.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: A person must have a commercial driver's license (CDL) to legally drive a commercial vehicle in Washington. Several types of vehicles are characterized as commercial vehicles under Washington law. Any single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 26,001 pounds or more is a commercial vehicle. This designation also covers any combination of vehicles if the vehicle being driven has a GVWR of 26,001 pounds or more, or the towed vehicle has a GVWR of 10,001 pounds when the combined GVWR equals 26,001 pounds or more. Vehicles designed to carry 16 or more passengers are considered commercial vehicles, including school buses. Certain vehicles that carry hazardous materials are also considered commercial vehicles.

To obtain a CDL, a person must apply to the Department of Licensing (DOL) and pay the application fee. DOL will not issue a CDL unless the applicant:

- is a resident of the state;
- has successfully completed an approved commercial driver instruction course;
- has passed a knowledge and skills test that complies with state and federal requirements; and
- has fulfilled the requirements of the federal Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act, together with any other state laws or other federal regulations.

The fee charged by DOL for a skills examination for a commercial motor vehicle license is \$250, unless the applicant's primary use of the license is for a public benefit not for profit corporation, that is either a head start program or supporting early childhood education and assistance programs, in which case the fee is \$225. If an applicant's primary use of the license is to drive a school bus, the skills examination fee for a commercial motor vehicle license is \$100. In each instance, the fee allows the applicant two attempts to pass the skills examination for a commercial motor vehicle license.

State law specifies that an applicant must apply in person at a licensing service office to renew a CDL. Since 2018, DOL practice has been to allow CDL renewals on-line.

DOL practice is to waive most CDL qualification standards, including retesting and retraining requirements, for applicants who previously have voluntarily surrendered a CDL, as long as the applicant is applying within one year of surrendering the license.

Summary of Bill: The fee charged by DOL for a skills examination for a commercial motor vehicle license is lowered to \$175, but the number of attempts to pass the examination for the payment of each fee is lowered from two to one. This lower skills examination fee applies to all applicants for a CDL, unless the applicant's primary use of the license is to drive a school bus, in which case the fee remains \$100.

An applicant, generally, is no longer required to apply in person at a licensing service office to renew a CDL.

DOL is given explicit authority to waive CDL or commercial learner's permit qualification

standards for applicants who previously have voluntarily surrendered a CDL.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2024.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This legislation is aimed at addressing the commercial driver shortage in the state. It will streamline the process for commercial driver licensing and remove some of the barriers. The bill balances safety and efficiency in the commercial driver regulation structure. This will facilitate prior commercial drivers returning to the profession. There was an extensive stakeholder process that went into the development of this proposal. The change in the skills examination fee is an attempt to balance the need for the driver schools to maintain an important revenue source for their operations, and not create a barrier for people to become commercial drivers. The skills examination fee rate was designed to be as close to revenue neutral as possible. A potential change that would improve the bill is to provide additional resources and policies aimed at reducing the barriers to entry into the commercial driver profession, particularly for low income and diverse populations.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Javier Valdez, Prime Sponsor; Jeff DeVere, Washington Trucking Associations; Beau Perschbacher, WA Dept. of Licensing; Maya Gillett; Mike Ennis, Association of Washington Business.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.