

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5717

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As of February 24, 2025

**Title:** An act relating to establishing a driver work zone and first responder safety course requirement.

**Brief Description:** Establishing a driver work zone and first responder safety course requirement.

**Sponsors:** Senators Lovick, King, Braun, Chapman, Cleveland, Cortes, Hasegawa, Lias, Lovelett, Nobles, Orwall, Valdez and Wilson, J..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/24/25.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires new driver's license applicants under the age of 26, beginning May 1, 2026, to pass an online work zone and first responder safety course.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

**Background:** Driver Training Education—Generally. To be eligible to obtain a driver's license, a person under the age of 18 must complete a driver training education course offered by a private driver training school licensed by the Department of Licensing (DOL) or by a school district. An applicant for a driver's license 18 years of age or older must successfully pass a driver licensing exam, but is not required to complete a driver training education course to be eligible for a license.

Driver Training Education—Curriculum. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and DOL are required to jointly develop and maintain a required

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curriculum for school districts and approved private schools operating a Traffic Safety Education Program. DOL is responsible for the administration and enforcement of laws pertaining to private driver training schools and driver training education courses, and may adopt and enforce administrative rules related to these laws.

The required curriculum for private driver training schools and school districts providing a Traffic Safety Education Program must include the following information:

- the safe, lawful, and responsible operation of motor vehicles;
- intermediate driver's license issuance;
- passenger and driving restrictions and sanctions for violating these restrictions;
- the effect of traffic violations and collisions on driving privileges;
- the effects of alcohol and drug use on motor vehicle operators;
- motorcycle awareness;
- bicycle safety;
- pedestrian safety;
- commercial vehicle, bus, and other large vehicle awareness;
- proper use of the left-hand lane by motor vehicles on multilane highways; and
- bicyclists' and pedestrians' rights and responsibilities and suggested riding procedures in common traffic situations.

Driver training education courses offered by a private driver training school for persons under the age of 18 must include:

- at least 30 hours of classroom instruction;
- at least six hours of behind-the-wheel instruction—or five or more hours of behind-the-wheel instruction and four or more hours of driving simulation; and
- one or more hours of in-vehicle driver observation.

Driver training education courses offered by school districts must include a minimum of:

- 30 hours of classroom instruction;
- 6 hours of driving experience; and
- 4 hours of in-vehicle driver observation.

Classroom instruction may be offered through in-person, classroom-based instruction or virtual classroom-based student instruction with a live instructor, as set by administrative rule. The classroom portion may also include self-paced, online components as authorized and certified by DOL.

**Summary of Bill:** The bill as referred to committee not considered.

**Summary of Bill (Proposed Substitute):** An applicant for a new driver's license who is under the age of 26, beginning May 1, 2026, must pass an online work zone and first responder safety course before issuance of an intermediate license or driver's license, as applicable.

DOL may waive the online course requirement if the online course is not available at the time of application.

DOL must contract with a provider of an online work zone and first responder safety course to host an online course, to be made available at no cost to applicants.

Work zone speed safety camera system revenue in excess of system operations and maintenance costs is eligible to fund the online work zone and first responder safety course.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on May 1, 2026.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony On Proposed Substitute:** PRO: In 2023, there were over 1000 crashes in work zones with ten being fatal. There was a larger increase in work zone crashes in 2024. Since 2011, there have been 1000 crashes in work zones each year. Work zone workers are often in harm's way, with instances of being hit while clearing roadkill and performing maintenance. The bill will ensure the next generation of drivers are educated in work zone safety. Work zone accidents are preventable, and a vast majority of drivers do not know how to navigate work zones.

Statistically, drivers aged between 18 and 25 that do not receive driver training education are most at risk for crashes in work zones. The bill provides a crucial baseline for training drivers and a good new resource. Using revenue from work zone safety cameras is an appropriate reinvestment in traffic safety. There is a critical lack of protective infrastructure in work zones. The current required curriculum does not provide the tools necessary for young drivers approaching these work zones. Work zones can be intimidating and confusing to new drivers.

OTHER: There are concerns with a lack of proper lawful implementation by DOL. The bill may preempt proper rule-making functions for implementation, which would allow experts to provide their perspective on course implementation. The bill should include provisions for this course to be covered on the licensing exam. Further revisions are needed on rules of the road provisions regarding approaching an emergency vehicle.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator John Lovick, Prime Sponsor; Kati Durkin, Washington Federation of State Employees; Mark Ottele, Granite Construction Company; Billy Wallace, Washington and Northern Idaho District Council of Laborers; Mallorie Davies, Washington and Northern Idaho District Council of Laborers.

OTHER: David Sedelmeier.

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