
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1081

AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF A GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM ON A SCHOOL BUS AND THE SHORTAGE OF SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS.

SUMMARY

This bill makes several changes to the laws governing Connecticut school bus drivers. It provides an exception to the distracted driving law for drivers using certain mobile devices for navigation. Under current law, school bus drivers generally are prohibited from using any mobile electronic device, including hands-free devices, except in an emergency. Under the bill, drivers may use a mobile electronic device that has a video display area between nine and 13 inches, measured diagonally, if it is:

1. used as a global positioning system (GPS) or for navigation, and
2. securely attached to the school bus dashboard and cannot be removed or used to engage in a call or to type, read, or send text (e.g., e-mail) or text messages while operating the bus.

The bill requires the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner to study and make recommendations on policies or initiatives to respond to the nationwide school bus driver shortage. The study must consider, at a minimum, increasing commercial driver's license (CDL) validity from four to five years and streamlining the licensing and renewal processes for a public passenger endorsement (PPE) to operate a school bus. By February 1, 2024, the commissioner must submit the study's results and recommendations to the Transportation Committee.

The bill also requires the DMV commissioner to (1) prioritize PPE applications and renewals to operate a school bus when scheduling road

tests and (2) between July 1, 2023, and until November 27, 2024, temporarily waive the engine (i.e., under-the-hood) component of the CDL test, as permitted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), upon the request of an applicant seeking or renewing this endorsement. Under the bill and the federal exemption (see BACKGROUND), applicants who receive a waiver and are granted an endorsement may only operate a school bus within the state to transport students to and from home, school, and school-sponsored events.

Lastly, the bill allows for the display of decals, posters, and stickers to advertise school bus driver employment opportunities on the sides and rear of school buses.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023, except the under-the-hood waiver (§ 3) and study (§ 4) are effective upon passage.

BACKGROUND

Under-the-Hood Test Exemption

In the Federal Register of October 27, 2022, FMCSA announced its decision to grant an exemption for CDL applicants seeking a school bus endorsement from the engine compartment portion of the pre-trip vehicle inspection skills testing requirement. FMCSA also granted a corresponding exemption from the requirement that states administer this part of the test according to its pre-approved examiner information manual. Drivers issued a CDL under this exemption are restricted to in-state school bus operation.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Transportation Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 36 Nay 0 (03/10/2023)