



Workforce Development

The Trucking Workforce Drives the Economy & Bolsters Supply Chain Integrity



ATA POSITION: ATA supports legislative and regulatory efforts that better facilitate the pairing of job seekers with trucking career opportunities which offer a median salary of \$70,000 in 2023 for truckload drivers, health and retirement benefits, paid time off, and potentially thousands of dollars in signing bonuses. With the trucking industry currently facing a shortage of more than 78,000 qualified drivers, coupled with a need to hire 1.2 million new drivers over the next decade to meet increasing freight demands, ATA encourages Congress to explore initiatives that expands the pool of qualified drivers while promoting appropriate safety standards and performance criteria. Additionally, ATA strongly opposes efforts to bar the trucking industry from utilizing the independent contractor business model, including the imposition of a restrictive national test to limit independent contractor status.

BACKGROUND: The trucking industry is a significant source of employment, with 8 million people working in various trucking-related occupations, accounting for 1 in every 17 jobs in the U.S. Furthermore, “truck driver” is a top 5 occupation in 30 states. However, it is no secret that the trucking industry is currently experiencing a significant, nationwide shortage of qualified drivers. Younger drivers in particular are needed; the median age of an over-the-road truck driver is 46—four years older than the average U.S. worker. The trucking industry offers fulfilling careers with family-sustaining salaries—all without the debt that often accompanies a college degree—but obsolete regulatory barriers prevent the trucking industry from offering these pathways to otherwise qualified individuals.

IMPACT: To stem the growing driver shortage and encourage greater diversity in the industry, ATA urges Congress to consider proposals that make careers in the trucking industry more accessible for young Americans beginning their working careers, those transitioning to a new career or reentering the workforce, military veterans, individuals reentering society from the justice system, and those in depressed communities and rural opportunity zones. Unlike other blue-collar professions, there are many barriers to entry for new truck drivers beyond the minimum age requirement, such as commercial driver’s license (CDL) testing standards, strict drug and alcohol testing regimes, and safe and clean driving records. If motor carriers could reach potential truck driver candidates straight out of high school, the trucking industry would be a better position to help candidates develop the skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for a long and satisfying career in the industry.

SOLUTION: Empowering individuals to seek rewarding careers enjoys broad bipartisan support, and ATA overwhelmingly supports legislation that promotes job opportunities for all Americans, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status. Similarly, ATA opposes efforts to force the 350,000 owner-operators who choose to work as independent contractors in trucking out of that entrepreneurial business model. Accordingly, ATA urges Congress to consider the following:

- 1) Support and engage in oversight of the Drive Safe Act Pilot Program, included in the *Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act*, to allow highly-trained younger drivers to operate in interstate commerce;
- 2) Promote and establish a permanent apprenticeship program to train and retain 18-to-20-year-olds on new, safe driving equipment so they can drive interstate commerce by co-sponsoring the DRIVE Safe Integrity Act (H.R. 3408);
- 3) Help students and workers afford truck driver training and credentialing programs by co-sponsoring the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act (H.R. 1477, S. 722), which would allow individuals to use their 529 savings plans to cover the costs of workforce training and credentialing programs;
- 4) Expand eligibility to use VA GI benefits for truck driver training schools by co-sponsoring the Veterans Improvement Commercial Driver License Act (H.R. 2830, S. 656);
- 5) Make shorter-term education and training programs, like CDL Training and Truck Driving Schools, eligible for federal Pell Grants, removing a large financial barrier to entry for workers interested in obtaining a CDL;
- 6) Fund CDL testing and training through the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). By subsidizing CDL training and testing, Congress can help qualified individuals overcome the financial barriers to entry and assist in an immediate infusion of trained drivers; and

- 7) Protect the independent contractor model and reject legislative efforts like those in California which seek to ban the independent contractor model.

There is no silver bullet solution to address the pervasive truck driver shortage, but taken together, the four aforementioned suggestions will open doors for all Americans and remove regulatory and financial barriers that prevent trucking from bolstering its workforce with ambitious, qualified drivers.

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