

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6656

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING A MOTOR VEHICLE OPERATOR'S LICENSE.

Vote Date: 3/17/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/15/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee

CO-SPONSORS:

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Rep. Robin E. Comey, 102nd Dist.

Rep. Eleni Kavros DeGraw, 17th Dist.

Sen. Derek Slap, 5th Dist.

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REASONS FOR BILL:

The state of Connecticut has many residents currently unable to get their driver's licenses due to the test not being available in their language, and this reality is a massive obstacle to the success of these individuals as it limits their ability to realistically seek employment, pursue an education, and their general individual autonomy. This bill would rectify this by requiring the DMV to offer the knowledge test for the driver's license in any language requested by the applicant as well as other measures to ensure equal opportunity so that any qualifying resident can pursue obtaining their driver's license.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Substitute language was adopted requiring the knowledge test be made available in 34 languages other than English and Spanish and requires the commissioner to consult with organizations representing refugees, immigrants, and individuals in the process of learning English as well as remain responsive to immigrant or refugee populations that may emerge in the state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Tony Guerrero, Commissioner of the DMV

The DMV continues to make efforts to enhance accessibility related to testing. In the case of languages offered, resources and cost are barriers to the ability to provide testing based on individually made requests. Administration of the test currently covers 11 languages in concordance with state law standards. Regarding Section 2, on-the-road skill tests at driving schools are offered to individuals up to the age of 21 based on complications related to limited staffing. The statutory change would call for considerable expansion of personnel. Finally, concerning the Taiwan program request, the DMV is willing to revisit it upon submission.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Anil Baral

In support of this bill saying the language barrier in obtaining a driver's license prevents individuals from commuting in the most convenient way; as a result, jobs requiring transportation are unattainable for non-English speaking communities. Section 1 of this bill would alleviate this problem.

Janet Bauer, Co-Chair, Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs

In support of Section 1 as it would alleviate the challenges faced by refugees and immigrants regarding the accessibility of Connecticut's driver's license examination. Newcomers who are currently unable to access the test in their native language will often travel to states where the test is provided in that language.

Edward Brittenham

In support of Section 1; as a volunteer for Danbury Area Refugee Assistance (DARA), Mr. Brittenham believes obtaining a license is a fundamental step for refugees to access opportunities for employment, education, etc. Making the test accessible would allow these individuals to contribute to the community.

Dana Bucin, Partner (Immigration Law) & DEI Chair, Martha Cullina LLP

Supports this bill stating that the most recent census statistics are outdated as they were recorded before the Afghanistan and Ukraine refugee crises. States that the ability to drive is essential for immigrants or refugees who settle here and do not know English and argues the CT DMV is possibly violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Barbara Davis

Supports this bill stating that Virginia now offers their learning permit in 24 languages and several states require the translation of government resources populations with limited English proficiency if they make up either 3% of the population served by the agency or 500 individuals which ever amount is lower. She further states that getting these individuals licenses then the hundreds of refugees that annually arrive in Connecticut would find it easier to find employment which would support their integration as well as the economy.

Maureen Devane

Supports this bill stating that Virginia now offers there learning permit in 24 languages and several states require the translation of government resources populations with limited english proficiency if they make up either 3% of the population served by the agency or 500 individuals which ever amount is lower. She says thousands of CT residents are effectively barred from seeking better opportunities through employment, education, or even enrolling their children in daycare or after school programs which require reliable transportation.

Shyam Lamichhane

Supports this bill allowing those who are not yet proficient in English would increase safety on the roads, as it would better ensure that drivers are fully aware and understand the rules and regulations they are operating under and prevent confusion that may cause accidents.

Pamela Lucas, CT Chapter, American Immigration Lawyers Association (CT AILA)

Supports Section 1 of the bill, as the current statute determines the languages under which the knowledge test for a class D motor vehicle operator's license is administered based on populations as indicated in the census, therefore remaining static during the ten-year census period despite the fluid influx of immigrants into the state. Additionally, the current statute only accounts for languages spoken by at least 1% of the population, even though the ability to drive is a necessity for any immigrant regardless of whether or not their population meets the 1% requirement.

Cici Petri, Owner, CC Driver Education

Supports this bill saying DMV currently allows driving schools to offer on-road license testing at their locations by a DMV agent for students up to the age of 21. Expanding the program for all ages would reduce foot traffic at the DMV by eliminating the need to go back and forth, creating a smoother process.

Rebecca Starble

Supports this bill advocating for CT DMV's driver's test to be available in more languages, particularly Pashto and Dari. Refugees who are unable to obtain a license since they are unable to pass the test in English often end up relying on the bus system as their primary means of transportation, but this system is equally difficult for them to navigate. Reducing these barriers would allow these individuals to meet their basic needs.

Marlene Tendler

Supports this bill saying the lack of accessibility for those trying to obtain a driver's license with limited English proficiency is a hinderance. It is necessary for these populations to have the ability to take the test in their native language in order to achieve self-sufficiency.

Rajan Timsina

Approves of the bill saying a driver's license is a basic requirement for transportation, but the test is not easy to pass for immigrants who cannot take it in their language. The state has a growing Nepalese community with a current population of around 5,000, but the test is not offered in Nepali.

Sandy Weinberg:

Supports this bill saying that as a volunteer and Co-Leader of the Healthcare Team with Danbury Area Refugee Assistance (DARA), Ms. Weinberg has worked with a group of Afghan refugees for the past year. One of the most difficult obstacles they've faced has been obtaining a driver's license, as the test is not administered in their native language. This has diminished their ability to be independent as it is difficult to find employment. Expanding translation of the test to include more languages will allow these refugees the tools to succeed.

The following also submitted testimony in support of HB-6656

Ganesh Aryal, Nepalese Association of CT

Prakash Thakur

Naina Rana

Jodie Sadowsky

Sagun Shrestha

Dhan Singh

Jennifer Starble

Madison MacKay

Sanumaya Maharjan

Tejesh Malla

Jennifer Milano

Ram Ojha

Narayan Paudel

Renee Pessin

Barbara Lane

Steven Lane

Susan DeWitt

Ruth Grobe

Frances Gurtman

Marietta Homayonpour

Babu Khatiwada

Michelle Kunzman

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Nathan Vieira

Date: 3/24/2023