

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1407

November 12, 2020

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao,

We write to express our support for the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) proposed pilot program to allow 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old drivers to operate commercial motor vehicles in interstate commerce (FMCSA-2018-0346). Similar to DOT's Military Commercial Driver Pilot Program, this new three-year program is a big leap towards improving the trucking industry and bolstering the sector's workforce while simultaneously improving transportation safety standards.

As you are likely aware, the proposed pilot program closely resembles the *DRIVE-Safe Act* (S.569/H.R.1374), legislation that calls for the implementation of an apprenticeship program to train commercial drivers under the age of 21. Currently, the bill enjoys strong bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate, and we hope it will become law soon.

Support for this pro-safety and pro-jobs legislation has been driven in part by the driver shortage first identified in the 1980s. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the trucking industry was short an estimated 60,000 drivers, and it is estimated the industry will need to hire 1.1 million new drivers over the next decade to keep pace with growing demand and an aging workforce.¹ If status quo is maintained, some estimates suggest the shortage could swell to 105,000 and 160,000 drivers in 2023 and 2028, respectively.² Once the economy recovers from the fallout of the pandemic, companies across supply chains will likely face higher transportation costs, leading to increased prices for consumers on everything from household goods to food at the grocery store – similar to the pre-pandemic environment. If successful, this pilot program would provide a direct means for the trucking industry to partially alleviate its workforce challenges, which in turn would strengthen our domestic supply chains.

¹ <https://www.trucking.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/ATAs%20Driver%20Shortage%20Report%202019%20with%20cover.pdf>

² <https://www.ttnews.com/articles/driver-shortage-over-temporarily>

In the same vein as the *DRIVE-Safe Act*, DOT's proposed pilot program is also firmly based on transportation safety. Per the Department's regulation of commercial vehicles, safety is the primary purpose and goal, and the proposed program will take significant steps to ensure the safe and efficient movement of interstate commerce. Today, 49 states and the District of Columbia allow commercial drivers under the age of 21 to operate in intrastate commerce. As established by the new pilot program, the robust training regimen goes far beyond what is currently required for 18-to-20-year-old commercial driver's license holders. This will not only set the stage for improving safety on our roads, but will also lead to a highly trained, talented, and safety-focused workforce across the industry.

Over the past few months, we have seen great levels of support from the Administration for our nation's freight industry, including various actions to relax certain trucking regulations. Without question, the mobilization of the trucking industry in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how critical its workforce is to the economy and our emergency response supply chain. Turning to the future, we are hopeful that this pilot program will reinvigorate this essential workforce, ensuring that the trucking industry is well-equipped to confront the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and any future health crisis.

Thank you for moving forward with this important pilot program. We look forward to working closely with you in this effort to bolster both transportation safety and our essential trucking workforce across the industry.

Sincerely,



Todd Young
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



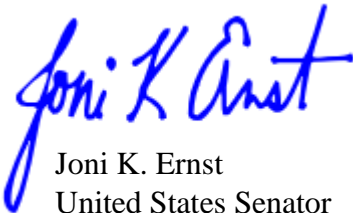
Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Michael B. Enzi
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



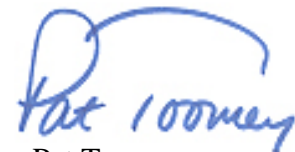
Rand Paul, M.D.
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator

/s/ Thom Tillis

Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Pat Toomey
United States Senator