



Coalition Commends Legislature for Passage of Bill to Lower the Age for Truck Drivers

For Immediate Release: May 15, 2019

Contact: Nancy Wall Hewston or Leah Garner (334) 834-6000

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – The Business Council of Alabama along with the Alabama Beverage Association, the Alabama Farmers Federation, the Alabama Retail Association, the Alabama Rural Electric Association of Cooperatives (AREA), the Alabama Trucking Association, Alabama’s chapter of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), and Manufacture Alabama praised the members of the Alabama Legislature today for passage of legislation to lower the age to 18 to obtain a commercial driver’s license.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Dexter Grimsley, R-Abbeville, will create thousands of new jobs and will allow Alabama businesses that rely on trucks to move their goods or equipment to better compete with surrounding states that do not have the same age restrictions. Sen. Donnie Chesteen, R-Geneva, carried the companion bill in the Senate.

“It is a workforce development bill, plain and simple,” said BCA President and CEO Katie Boyd Britt. “This commonsense legislation will open the door of opportunity for young adults who are looking to find a good paying job, and at the same time, it addresses a dire need for Alabama businesses that rely on trucks to move their products. I applaud Rep. Grimsley and Sen. Chesteen for their leadership in this effort.”

The current age restriction bars anyone under the age of 21 from operating the standard tractor-trailer combination in Alabama. Many are lost to other industries by the time they reach the age of 21. Currently, Alabama is one of only two states that restricts a Class A commercial driver’s license to those who are 21 years or older.

“Alabama’s beverage industry relies heavily upon able CDL drivers to deliver our products to customers across the state,” said Alabama Beverage Association Executive Director Virginia Banister. “The shortage of these drivers continues to be a challenge to our business, and we are hopeful that this new law will create a pathway to qualify more drivers and broaden the pool of eligible hires for some very good paying jobs in the state of Alabama.”

All new drivers must meet training and testing guidelines set forth by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, and drivers ages 18-21 may not operate a commercial motor vehicle transporting hazardous material.

“Our country is facing a severe shortage of truckers,” said Federation President Jimmy Parnell. “This impacts the ability of farmers and forest landowners to get equipment and supplies in a timely manner as well as market their products. This legislation is a step in the right direction and will benefit all families, businesses and industries.”

The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 24-0 on Wednesday. The House previously had passed the bill by a vote of 96-1.

“This legislation will give highly trained utility workers who don’t meet an arbitrary age requirement to be able to perform vital services on our electric grid,” said Sean Strickler, vice president of public affairs for AREA. “Alabama’s electric cooperatives strive to keep the power on all the time but unfortunately in rare instances it goes out and this legislation will get it restored even faster than we do now.”

“This legislation is a win-win for motor carriers, shippers and consumers,” said Alabama Trucking Association President and CEO Frank Filgo. “The ongoing truck driver shortage, now estimated to be more than 60,000 nationally, is a burden to the economy. With the passage of this bill, additional drivers will help advance long-term, sustainable profitability for Alabama motor carriers and suppliers.”

"One of the greatest challenges facing Alabama's small businesses today is finding qualified workers," said Rosemary Elebash, NFIB's state director for Alabama. "This legislation is going to help small businesses fill critical jobs and create new opportunities for young adults just entering the workforce. It's a win-win."

“The shortage of truck drivers has become increasingly challenging for manufacturers,” said Manufacture Alabama President George Clark. “It costs manufacturers a lot of money every time a shipment of raw materials is not delivered and every time a product does not leave the plant on time. This is a commonsense measure that is good for industry in Alabama.”