

March 2021

The DRIVE-Safe Act

The Issue: The National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) supports the DRIVE-Safe Act, which would create an apprenticeship program for commercial drivers. The propane industry relies on over-the-road transportation to deliver fuel to homes, schools, businesses, and farms across the country. However, the current shortage of commercial drivers threatens the industry's ability to deliver propane efficiently.

Background: NPGA members transport fuel over the road by highway transport trucks, which deliver propane to bulk plant facilities, or by local bulk delivery trucks, called bobtails. Over 95 percent of propane marketers are motor carriers designated as small businesses, with some possessing regional operations. Attracting and training new people to the transportation sector is vital for the propane industry.

The DRIVE-Safe Act would direct the Secretary of Transportation to issue regulations to permit an 18–21-year-old Commercial Driver's License holder to drive a commercial vehicle across state lines during and upon the completion of a two-step apprenticeship program.

First, a driver apprentice must complete 120 hours of "on-duty time," 80 hours of which must be "driving time" accompanied in the vehicle by an experienced, licensed driver. The driver apprentice must demonstrate core competencies and meet performance benchmarks.

Second, the driver apprentice must complete 280 hours of "on-duty time," 160 hours of which must be "driving time" accompanied in the vehicle by an experienced, licensed driver. The apprentice must satisfy additional performance benchmarks to the satisfaction of the employer.

Commercial vehicles utilized by driver apprentices must meet technological requirements, and experienced, licensed drivers must satisfy specific criteria. Additionally, driver apprentices involved in "preventable accidents" or "a moving violation that is reportable to Department of Transportation" during the apprenticeship would be subject to remediation and additional hours of training until the driver apprentice demonstrates the performance benchmarks.

In September 2020, the popularity of this legislation in Congress motivated President Trump and the Department of Transportation to propose its own pilot program to allow truck drivers aged 18-20 to drive across state lines. The Biden administration may limit the opportunity for a favorable rulemaking, so a legislative push will continue during the 117th Congress.

The Ask: Please support and cosponsor the DRIVE-Safe Act to establish a driver apprenticeship program that supports the continuation of America's domestic energy reliability and infrastructure.