

November 3, 2015

To Members of the House of Representatives:

The undersigned organizations representing all sectors of the agricultural industry strongly urge your support for an amendment to the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015 that will be offered by Rep. Rick Crawford of Arkansas and Rep. Brad Ashford of Nebraska to establish a Short Haul Graduated Driver Pilot Program.

We believe the Crawford-Ashford proposal will provide immediate reforms to an outdated federal general driver age requirement, provide increased economic opportunities for unemployed young adults, and address a growing driver shortage while maintaining the agricultural industry's strong transportation safety record. The federal requirements for drivers operating a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) in interstate commerce go back decades when the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) adopted regulations. In all contiguous 48 states the age requirement for an individual to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) is 18 years old. All drivers between the ages of 18 to 20 years old with a state CDL are only allowed to operate within their state lines (i.e. intrastate). However, due to existing federal regulations a driver must be 21 years old to operate a CMV from one state into an adjacent state (i.e. interstate).

Many agribusinesses operate near a state line with their farm and ranch customers located within a 150-air mile radius of the facility. Their drivers spend a significant amount of time on the job during the peak seasons delivering crop input supplies or in the fields applying product, not driving on public roads. They typically return to their home at the end of the work day. Only allowing employees over the age of 21 with a CDL to deliver product to their customers imposes undue restrictions and limits the work opportunities for employees between the ages of 18 to 20.

Historically, young workers face considerably higher unemployment rates than older workers. The youth unemployment rate in the United States increased to 12.30 percent in March 2015 from 11.90 percent in February 2015. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the youth unemployment rate reached an all-time high of 19.50 percent in April 2010. Unemployment early in a young person's career can have a lasting negative effect on their earnings, productivity, and employment opportunities. It is important to provide the nation's young adults with the skills necessary to obtain an important job in the labor market.

We believe it is time for an outdated federal age requirement to be reformed due to the growing driver shortage, an aging agricultural workforce and continuous high young adult unemployment rate. Without truck drivers, America's agricultural industry and economy will be adversely impacted. While there is a Graduated Driver Pilot Program included in the current House legislation, it is drafted in such a way that unnecessarily delays its implementation, requires state agreements (limited to 6), severely limits the number of motor carrier participants (10 per state agreement), and arbitrarily establishes the minimum age requirement to participate to 19 years 6 months old, resulting in minimal to no real benefits to the agricultural industry or their rural communities.

The Crawford-Ashford Amendment directs the Secretary of Transportation to carry out a pilot program within 180 days after enactment of this legislation. The pilot proposal would require participating individuals be at least 18 years old, satisfy all existing federal and state requirements to obtain a CDL (other than requirements relating to age), operate a CMV no more than a 150-air mile radius from the

normal work reporting location of the individual, and only for the purpose of transporting farm supplies, agricultural commodities, livestock, poultry, farm machinery, and other agricultural products as determined by the Secretary. Following the collection of 3 years of safety data, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) shall submit a report to Congress with the safety results from the pilot program. If the DOT determines there was no negative impact on safety the agency shall go through a formal rulemaking process to make the revised regulations included in the pilot program continue on a more permanent basis.

On behalf of America's agricultural industry, we urge you to support this common-sense, bi-partisan amendment that maintains highway safety while promoting economic opportunities for young adults and provides much needed drivers for agribusinesses.

Respectfully,

AgriBusiness Association of Kentucky
Agricultural Council of Arkansas
Agricultural & Food Transporters Conference
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
Alabama Agribusiness Council
American Soybean Association
Far West Agribusiness Association
Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association
Georgia Agribusiness Council
Grain and Feed Association of Illinois
Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association
Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Minnesota Crop Protection Retailers
Minnesota Grain and Feed Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

National Grain & Feed Association
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Potato Council
National Sunflower Association
National Turkey Federation
Nebraska Agri-Business Association
New York State Agribusiness Association
Ohio AgriBusiness Association
Oklahoma Agribusiness Retailers Association
U.S. Canola Association
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association
South Dakota Agri-Business Association
South Dakota Grain & Feed Association
Texas Ag industries Association
Virginia Agribusiness Council
Western Growers
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association