

ADVANCE Act: Active Duty Voluntary Acquisition of Necessary Credentials for Employment

Sponsored by Senators Elizabeth Warren and John Cornyn

The military trains thousands of truck drivers. The military services own more than 50,000 heavy trucks and buses, and employ more than 17,000 individuals to operate them.¹ Heavy military vehicles include everything from semi-tractor trailers to troop transports and passenger buses to fuel and water trucks. The military personnel that operate them receive weeks of rigorous training, including basic combat training, vehicle maintenance, handling hazardous cargo, and accident prevention. And once trained, operators may be responsible for maneuvering these vehicles while deployed in dangerous or extreme conditions, including at night, in combat areas, or while carrying hazardous cargo.

The commercial trucking industry is experiencing a driver shortage. The majority of the nation's freight moves on the highway – more than 70 percent of freight value is moved by truck.² But the current average driver age in the trucking industry is 49 years, and many companies are struggling to find qualified drivers.³ A 2015 study by the American Trucking Associations found that the trucking industry will need to hire a total of 890,000 new drivers over the next decade to replace retiring drivers and keep up with demand.⁴

Transitioning servicemembers can help fill this gap. But before they can be employed, servicemembers must obtain their Commercial Driver's License (CDL), a process that involves both a knowledge and skills test and can be time-consuming and expensive.

While Congress waived the CDL requirement for some veterans, loopholes remain. In last year's FAST Act, Congress directed that the Department of Transportation exempt veterans with relevant experience from some testing associated with getting a CDL, or provide credit toward training for a CDL.⁵ However, that language does not apply to current servicemembers and reservists. In practice, that means a transitioning servicemember must wait to formally become a veteran before receiving their CDL, which could lead to gaps in employment.

ADVANCE Act

Makes it easier for servicemembers to transfer their military skills into a civilian career.

Expands DOT's waiver authority to serving personnel. The ADVANCE Act expands the exemption to cover both Active Duty and Reserve Component, allowing military personnel to get their CDL *before* they leave military service, and expediting the transition into civilian employment in the commercial trucking industry

Makes it easier to hire veterans into the commercial trucking industry. The bill makes it easier for servicemembers to leave the military with their CDL, making them more attractive hires for good jobs with civilian trucking companies.

¹ http://www.myfuture.com/military/overview/heavy-and-tractor-trailer-truck-drivers_53-3032.00

² Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. "2016 Freight Quick Facts Report." <https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop16083/index.htm>

³ American Trucking Associations. "Truck Driver Shortage Analysis 2015." October 2015.

⁴ <http://www.trucking.org/ATA%20Docs/News%20and%20Information/Reports%20Trends%20and%20Statistics/10%206%2015%20ATAs%20Driver%20Shortage%20Report%202015.pdf>
⁵ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trucking-industry-will-need-890-000-new-drivers-in-next-decade-report-1444153801>

⁵ P.L. 114-94 § 5401.