

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The American Trucking Associations (ATA) is lauding a new pilot program that will allow non-military young drivers to drive commercial trucks in interstate commerce.

“ATA supports FMCSA’s efforts to expand on its current work examining younger commercial drivers,” said ATA president and CEO Chris Spear. “Right now, 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old drivers are driving trucks in the United States. What these pilot programs will do is set out a path for these drivers to fully participate in our industry by allowing them to drive interstate.”

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) announced it is seeking comment on what training, qualifications, driving limitations and vehicle safety systems it should consider for the pilot.

“Allowing younger drivers, who are already moving goods intrastate, to drive interstate is a common sense step that has support not just from the trucking industry, but from a broad coalition,” Spear said. “Between FMCSA’s proposed pilot project and the bipartisan support for the Drive SAFE Act in Congress, we hope we will soon create a path for more young people to fully participate in our industry.”

However, the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA) took an opposing view of the pilot.

“Rather than developing ways to allow more teenagers behind the wheel of commercial trucks, the federal government should be taking steps to reverse the incessantly high driver turnover rate, which remains above 90% among large truckload carriers,” said Todd Spencer, president of OOIDA. “Efforts should focus on improving the industry instead of trying to hire more cheap labor.”

OOIDA argues that younger drivers lack the maturity and experience to operate commercial vehicles at the safest levels. It also points out drivers under the age of 21 are more likely to be involved in crashes.

“Launching this pilot program would go against FMCSA’s goal of improving highway safety,” Spencer said. “The agency should not be used as a tool for large motor carriers to expand their driver pool instead of fixing the problems that have led to their extremely high turnover rates. If highway safety is the priority, the age should go up, not down. Instead of efforts to entice the least experienced, the focus should be hiring and retaining the most experienced drivers, not expanding the funnel of driver churn.”

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