
February 1, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support – House Bill 161 – Vehicle Laws – Driver’s Licenses, Learner’s Instructional Permits, and Identification Cards

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 161 as it improves quality of life for those experiencing unique hardships, assists those serving in public sector jobs requiring time abroad, and improves roadway safety for motorcycle endorsement applicants.

House Bill 161 allows the MDOT Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to issue an Identification (ID) card to certain populations free of charge. It further would expand eligibility of out-of-state renewal options to civilian contractors of the federal government, including civilians working abroad for the military. Finally, it would extend a learner’s permit for a non-Graduated Licensing System (GLS) permit from six months to one year.

Providing Maryland residents with a form of identification connects people to life’s opportunities. The cost of a regular identification card is \$24 for a new, adult, full-term identification card and \$20 for a duplicate. Sometimes, customers are in difficult situations and struggle to afford this cost. The MVA has worked with many support organizations and agencies over the years to offer a reduction in the fee to \$1 for those in specific situations who are experiencing unique economic hardships. However, the costs incurred by the MVA merely in collecting and accounting for the \$1 fee charged to these customers exceeds the revenue generated by the charge itself, and this isn’t even accounting for the costs incurred by the product itself. With low rates of 811 customers in Fiscal Year (FY) 22 and 975 in FY23, the overall proposal should result in net savings for the MVA services provided as a result. With this legislation, the MVA can provide the vital identification product for customers in need while reducing the burdensome administrative costs incurred by the MVA through increased efficiencies.

Additionally, some applicants’ licenses or identification cards expire while they are working overseas, including for the armed services. These customers have documentation indicating they are civilians and have been out of the country for purposes related to government contracting work. Many of these customers are working side-by-side with the armed services or the U.S. Department of State. Currently, there are no provisions that keeps these customers’ licenses in effect for the duration of their work despite their public service on behalf of the country.

The MVA receives approximately 15-20 requests monthly from these types of situations faced by civilian contractors and is unable to assist them with out of state renewal unless they are a uniformed member of the armed services. Extending the ability for the MVA to offer out-of-state renewal processes for these Marylanders who are serving their country overseas in unique roles would update the MVA's services to reflect the modern landscape of the federal workforce. As Maryland is uniquely situated geographically to the federal government and its agencies that focus on overseas work on behalf of American interests, offering this reform is a necessary customer service reform for the MVA to provide for the large population serving in these modern public service roles.

Finally, the MVA is seeking to extend the non-GLS learner's permit. During the 2023 session, at the MVA's request, the legislature extended the term for a commercial learner's permit to one-year, providing commercial drivers a needed update to the timeframe during which they can receive needed safety and skills training along with more behind the wheel training with a licensed driver. Several years ago, the legislature extended the GLS learner's permit to one-year and this proposal would extend the same timeframe to non-GLS learner's permits. It would allow applicants seeking a motorcycle endorsement to have additional behind the wheel time with an experienced driver along with completing additional training if needed. Applicants who are obtaining a Motorcycle Endorsement on their license (which is mainly used seasonally) would then have the needed flexibility to complete a driving test regardless of the season, allowing for more flexibility on when they complete the training course and giving them the needed time behind the handlebars to gain necessary skills for safe operation. Further benefits also would allow out of country applicants to get the proper road time, and in some cases these applicants would be able to have additional time to obtain their out of country licenses through their host country if they were previously licensed.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant House Bill 161 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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