

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Transportation Committee

BILL: CS/SB 2672

INTRODUCER: Transportation Committee and Senator Crist

SUBJECT: Vision Test/Driver Licenses

DATE: April 25, 2006

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Davis	Meyer	TR	Fav/CS
2.			GE	
3.			TA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

Currently, the Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) mails renewal notices directing eligible licensees to appear at a driver license office for in-person renewal or to transmit the completed renewal notice and the fees to the DHSMV by mail, electronically, or telephonically within the 30 days preceding the licensee's birthday for a license extension. DHSMV may issue 6-year license extensions by mail, electronic, or telephonic means without vision examinations for drivers who have no convictions or suspensions and who are not over 79 years of age. Licensed drivers are eligible for two consecutive license extensions without a required vision examination. Those individuals who are over 79 years of age are required to undergo a mandatory vision test and provide proof of meeting the statutory vision standards to be eligible to renew their driving privilege. The fees for license renewals are the same for all applicants, regardless of the validity period of the license.

Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 2672 (CS) requires all applicants, regardless of age, to submit to a vision test when applying for the renewal of a driver's license, either in person or through the submission of a report by an authorized and appropriate medical professional. The CS allows for the results of a vision exam done up to 12 months before the renewal application, to be submitted. The CS includes ophthalmologists in the list of medical professionals authorized to submit these reports. The CS also specifies no driver's license may be issued or renewed for a length of time greater than a driver's 80th birthday and requires a mandatory 4-year driver's license renewal period for persons over 80 years of age. Specifically, the CS provides the driver's license of any person expires at midnight on the licensee's 80th birthday. Each renewal after a person's 80th birthday requires passing an eye and hearing examination. Also, the CS provides renewal fees would be waived for drivers with a license held for less than 4 years prior to their 80th birthday.

The CS's mandatory vision tests and revisions to the duration of renewal licenses issued to people 80 years of age and older would have a workload impact on DHSMV. The CS will require funding for additional FTEs, facilities, equipment and programming and may have a negative fiscal impact for the first year and on a recurring basis.

This CS substantially amends section 322.18 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Driver's License Examination Requirements

The DHSMV is currently required by s. 322.18, F.S to examine every first time applicant, regardless of age, prior to the issuance of an original Florida driver license. The examination includes a test of eyesight and hearing, ability to read and understand highway signs, knowledge of traffic laws, and a demonstration of motor vehicle operation skills. However, a new Florida resident with a valid out-of-state license may reciprocate his or her license and only be required to pass the eye exam.

Once a license is issued, the DHSMV continuously monitors driver performance through reexaminations of drivers appearing to be incompetent. On written notice of at least 5 days, the DHSMV, having good cause, may require a licensed driver to submit to an examination or reexamination.¹ "Good cause" includes, but is not limited to, the recommendation from a court, a law enforcement agency, or a physician.

A licensee may also be subject to reexamination by the DHSMV upon renewal. The examination consists of tests of the licensee's eyesight and hearing and his or her ability to read and understand highway signs and pavement markings.

Driver's License Issuance Periods

Pursuant to, s. 322.18, F.S., an initial driver license issuance is generally valid for 6 years, concurrent with the applicant's birthday. If an applicant establishes his or her identity for a driver's license using either an employment authorization card or a proof of nonimmigrant classification (both are issued by the United States Department of Homeland Security), then the driver's license expires 2 years after the date of issuance or upon the expiration date cited on the Department of Homeland Security documents, whichever date first occurs. In addition, commercial driver's licenses with hazardous-materials endorsements are only valid for 4 years.

A renewal driver's license is valid for 4 years. However, if the applicant's driving record includes no convictions for the preceding 3 years, or no revocations, disqualifications, or suspensions over the preceding 7 years, the renewal driver's license is valid for 6 years.

Currently, the DHSMV may issue 4-year and 6-year license extensions by mail, electronic, or telephonic means without a vision examination for drivers who are not over 79 years of age, unless renewal applicants are directed by the DHSMV to appear for an in-person examination. Licensed drivers are eligible for two consecutive license extensions without a required

¹ Section 322.221, F.S.

examination by the DHSMV. Therefore, the maximum time from the original driver license issuance to the end of the second license renewal could be a maximum of 18 years (6-year original license and 2 mail-in or electronic renewal periods of 6 years each equaling 18 years.)

However, a licensee who is otherwise eligible for a renewal license and who is over 79 years of age must:

- Submit to and pass a vision test administered at any driver's license office; or
- If applying for an extension by mail, submit to a vision test administered by a licensed physician or optometrist.

The physician or optometrist must send the results of the test to the DHSMV on the proper DHSMV form signed by the physician or optometrist, or may do so by electronic means. The renewal applicant must meet vision standards equivalent to DHSMV's vision test. Also, a licensee who is over 79 years of age may not submit an application for extension by electronic or telephonic means, unless a physician or optometrist has already electronically submitted the results of a vision test to DHSMV.

Driver's License Fees

The fee for an original operator's (class D) driver's license is \$20 and the fee for renewal or extension is \$15. Driver license fees are set out in s. 322.21, F.S. The renewal fee is applicable for both a 4 and 6-year license. Driver license fees are deposited into the General Revenue Fund.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Driver's License Examination Requirements

This CS amends s. 322.18, F.S., to require all individuals to submit to a vision test when applying for the renewal of their driver's license, either in person or through the submission of a report by an authorized and appropriate medical professional. The CS specifically includes ophthalmologists in the list of appropriate medical professionals authorized to submit these reports. The vision test must be performed no more than twelve months prior to the application for renewal.

Driver's License Issuance Periods

The CS revises s. 322.18, F.S., to provide a driver's license expires on a licensee's 80th birthday and provides for a 4-year license renewal period for persons over 80 years of age. Each renewal after a person's 80th birthday requires passing an eye and hearing examination.

Driver's License Fees

This CS also amends s. 322.18, F.S., to waive the license renewal fees for drivers who have a license held for less than 4 years prior to their 80th birthday.

According to DHSMV, approximately 2 million license renewals are issued annually through its field offices and headquarters' central issuance processing system. The vast majority of these would be subject to the mandatory vision-testing requirement of the CS. Because of the CS's vision test requirements, the percentage of individuals using either electronic or telephonic means to renew would likely decrease as individuals may be more likely to renew at a field

issuance office where vision tests are free of charge as opposed to visiting a licensed medical professional. This would result in a corresponding increase in the number of individuals who will go to a field issuance office to renew their driver's license. The CS's revisions to the duration of renewal licenses issued to people 80 years of age and older could also have a significant workload impact on DHSMV.

Additional examiners and office manager positions would be required to process the increased number of individuals expected to renew in a field issuance office rather than utilizing a convenience method, as well as processing the additional renewal activity for those drivers aged 80 and older.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The CS requires all applicants, regardless of age, to submit to a vision test when applying for the renewal of a driver's license, adds ophthalmologists to the list of appropriate medical professionals authorized to submit reports for these tests, and provides for a shorter license renewal period for person over 80 years of age; therefore, more individuals may visit ophthalmologists or other licensed physicians for these mandatory vision tests.

C. Government Sector Impact:

According to the DHSMV, requiring all applicants regardless of age to submit to a vision test when applying for the renewal of a driver's license in person or through the submission of a report by an authorized and appropriate medical professional will have a significant fiscal impact. The CS will also require funding additional positions, facilities and equipment for the first year and on a recurring basis.

The CS may also require contracted programming modifications to the Driver License Information System. DHSMV is preparing a fiscal impact estimate for CS/SB 2672; however the estimate was not complete as of the date of this analysis.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

DHSMV recommends the effective date be changed to February 1, 2007 to allow sufficient time for implementation of the CS's requirements.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
