

ATA Leaders Vote Overwhelmingly To Support Sen. Schumer's Anti-Texting Bill

The ATA Executive Committee voted overwhelmingly at its management conference and exhibition on October 7 to support a bill introduced by U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) to ban texting by all drivers.

The 42-member committee voted to support Sen. Schumer's approach to the hazard of texting, which would require states to enact and enforce a law that "except in the event of an emergency, prohibits an operator of a moving motor vehicle from writing, sending, or reading a text message using a hand-held mobile telephone" or other personal electronic device.

The bill is known as the Avoiding Life-Endangering and Reckless Texting by Drivers Act, or the ALERT Drivers Act, and was introduced also by Sens. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), Mary Landrieu (D-L.A.) and Kay Hagan (D-N.C.). This legislation was drafted after several mass transit crashes were caused by distracted operators and after Virginia Tech researchers revealed that drivers are 23 times more likely to get into a crash when texting on their phones. The bill defines a hand-held mobile telephone as mobile telephone or other portable electronic communication device with which a user engages in a call or writes, sends or reads a text message using at least one hand. It does not include a vehicle-integrated, voice-activated device.

"A year ago, trucking industry leaders called the nation's attention to the dangers of texting and cell phone use by drivers of all motor vehicles," said ATA President and CEO Bill Graves. "ATA is continuing this leadership this year by supporting Sen. Schumer's effort to eliminate this dangerous threat to safety on our highways."

In addition to support for a ban on texting while driving, the ATA's Board of Directors voted to approve three new policy statements supporting the use of onboard safety systems, on use of natural gas as a truck fuel, and on the safety value of requiring that passenger vehicle driver education classes educate and test drivers on operating safely near commercial motor vehicles. The text of each of those resolutions are:

Onboard Technology

"ATA supports the use of onboard safety systems for all motor vehicles in an effort to enhance the safety of all roadway users (to include, but not limited to, lane departure warning systems, brake stroke monitoring systems, automated transmissions, vehicle stability control and collision avoidance systems) and believes incentives should be provided to encourage their adoption."

Natural Gas

"Natural gas should remain a voluntary alternative fuel. The trucking industry supports financial incentives to encourage trucking companies to use natural gas, provided that those financial incentives do not reduce money allocated to the highway trust fund. The trucking industry opposes government actions that artificially increase the cost of diesel fuel compared to other transportation fuels."

Passenger Vehicle Driver Education and Testing

"States that currently conduct driver education shall educate and test new drivers on awareness and safe interaction with commercial motor vehicle traffic. Such education must require classroom instruction and behind-the-wheel training that includes, but is not limited to, truck stopping distances, proper distances for following trucks, identification of truck blind spots, and avoidance of driving in those blind spots. Testing shall also include the above issues."