

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 28, 2019

1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair
Senator Mike Shower, Vice Chair
Senator David Wilson
Senator Jesse Kiehl

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Peter Micciche

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 75

"An Act relating to a license to drive a commercial motor vehicle."

- MOVED SB 75 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 84

"An Act naming the Trooper Gabe Rich Memorial Bridge."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 75

SHORT TITLE: COMMERCIAL VEHICLE LICENSING REQ'S

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) COSTELLO

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|----------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 03/06/19 | (S) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 03/06/19 | (S) | TRA, STA |
| 03/19/19 | (S) | TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205 |
| 03/19/19 | (S) | Heard & Held |
| 03/19/19 | (S) | MINUTE(TRA) |
| 03/28/19 | (S) | TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205 |

BILL: SB 84

SHORT TITLE: NAMING TROOPER GABE RICH MEMORIAL BRIDGE

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) COGHILL

03/11/19 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/11/19 (S) TRA, FIN
03/28/19 (S) TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

DON ETHERIDGE, Lobbyist
AFL CIO
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 75.

AVES THOMPSON, Executive Director
Alaska Trucking Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 75.

RADAMES MERCADO, Intern
Senator John Coghill
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 84 on behalf of the sponsor.

ANGIE RICH, representing Trooper Rich's family
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 84.

RONALD WALL, Captain
Alaska State Troopers
Department of Public Safety
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 84.

DAVID RICH, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 84.

ACTION NARRATIVE

1:30:00 PM

CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wilson, Kiehl, and Chair Hughes. Senator Shower arrived soon thereafter.

SB 75-COMMERCIAL VEHICLE LICENSING REQ'S

1:30:36 PM

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 75 "An Act relating to a license to drive a commercial motor vehicle."

She noted that the bill was introduced on March 31 and the committee previously heard invited testimony.

1:31:23 PM

CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony on SB 75.

CHAIR SHOWER joined the meeting.

1:31:53 PM

DON ETHERIDGE, Lobbyist, AFL CIO, Juneau, testified in support of SB 75. He explained that many training programs require the apprentice to have a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) in the first 2,000 hours of the program to advance to the next step. [An apprentice who is precluded from taking the CDL test because of age] could be delayed up to a year in completing the apprenticeship program. SB 75 addresses this issue. Noting that "in a previous life" he worked with at-risk youth, he said the bill has the potential to help young people who see no reason to complete high school but are looking for job opportunities. He said those youths would sometimes look at their work options and return to school to get their diploma.

CHAIR HUGHES asked if an 18-year-old has to have a high school diploma to take the CDL test.

MR. ETHRIDGE said no, but the CDL test is rigorous and somebody who can't do high-school-level work would have trouble passing. He noted that the AFL-CIO apprenticeship programs require either a GED (general education diploma) or a high school diploma.

CHAIR HUGHES said she has respect for commercial truck drivers after trying her hand driving a semi in the state fair parking lot with Northern Industrial Training.

SENATOR SHOWER argued that the armed services also teaches kids about hard work and what's important in life.

1:35:37 PM

AVES THOMPSON, Executive Director, Alaska Trucking Association (ATA), Anchorage, stated that ATA is a statewide organization that represents nearly 200 member companies. He said that

freight moving is an essential element of the economy that impacts everyone. He said he was testifying in support of SB 75 because ATA believes that lowering the eligibility age for an intrastate CDL will provide young men and women with a path to a truck-driving career.

He said that his previous testimony failed to mention that both intrastate and interstate drivers are subject to the same qualifications and medical, safety, and equipment rules. The state adopts the federal rules by reference in the Alaska Administrative Code. He also pointed out that an 18-year-old can receive a commercial pilot's license. He said ATA believes that lowering the intrastate age requirement to 18 will allow students to go directly from school into commercial truck driver training. The CDL doesn't automatically create a professional truck driver, he said, but it provides the opportunity. ATA believes SB 75 provides an opportunity for young people and the potential to create a larger driver pool to help satisfy the demand for commercial drivers. He highlighted that the current commercial driver shortage will only get worse if a major project begins. SB 75 will help solve that problem and also ensure that Alaska is ready when Congress passes federal legislation lowering the interstate driving age, he said.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked him for clarifying that except for age, the qualifications are the same for interstate and intrastate, and the reminder that someone is eligible to receive a commercial pilot's license at age 18.

MR. THOMPSON said he also wanted to say he agrees with Mr. Ethridge that the CDL test is not easy. Simply taking the test demonstrates some commitment to hard work, he said.

SENATOR SHOWER asked, should the bill pass, if there was a plan to get the word out about the age reduction.

MR. THOMPSON said ATA will work with the King Technology Center and schools throughout Alaska. Through word of mouth, members will also let it be known that an 18-year-old is eligible to take the CDL test.

CHAIR HUGHES encouraged him to notify the commissioners of labor and education about this career option, should the bill pass.

[1:40:37 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL related that Mr. Thompson visited his office to discuss the insurance requirements and to clarify that lowering

the age to 18 would not raise insurance rates for every trucking company.

CHAIR SHOWER thanked him for putting that on the record.

SENATOR SHOWER asked if somebody with driving infractions would be precluded from receiving a CDL.

MR. THOMPSON said potentially yes; drug convictions could severely constrain the ability to get a CDL.

[1:42:57 PM](#)

MR. ETHRIDGE added that somebody who has a drug or DUI conviction must wait five years before they can test for a CDL.

CHAIR HUGHES found no further questions or comments and asked the will of the committee.

[1:43:46 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER moved to report SB 75, work order 31-LS0610\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[1:44:05 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES stated that without objection, SB 75 passed from the Senate Transportation Standing Committee.

[1:44:14 PM](#)

At ease

SB 84-NAMING TROOPER GABE RICH MEMORIAL BRIDGE

[1:44:14 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 84 "An Act naming the Trooper Gabe Rich Memorial Bridge."

[1:46:09 PM](#)

RYNNIEVA MOSS, Staff, Senator John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, introduced herself and Intern Radames Mercado.

[1:46:50 PM](#)

RADAMES MERCADO, Intern, Senator John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, introduced SB 84 speaking to the following sponsor statement: [Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Bill 84 (SB 84) Naming the Trooper Gabe Rich Memorial Bridge

SB 84 will rename bridge number 392 over the Chatanika River at mile 38.8 of the Steese Highway to the "Trooper Gabe Rich Memorial Bridge".

The name change honors Trooper Gabe Rich, who performed his duties as an Alaska State Trooper with honor and courage until his End of Watch on May 1, 2014.

This bill will memorialize his name onto the bridge approximately two hours from Central, Alaska, Gabe's favorite place to visit in the state.

He took many camping and hunting trips with his grandfather Dick Ganley in the Central community and became lifelong friends with several people there; Gabe made acquaintances with many different people of all ages and backgrounds, showing each of them respect.

Gabe Rich became the captain of the Lathrup High School hockey team during his senior year, graduating from Lathrup High School in 2006; like many Alaskans, Gabe enjoyed snow machining in the Alaskan winters, playing hockey with friends, and hunting with those he was close to.

He attended Montana State University and the University of Alaska Anchorage before becoming a law enforcement officer, and in 2013, Gabe was given an Accommodation for Honorable Service.

Gabe's last assignment as an Alaska State Trooper was in the "D" Detachments Rural Unit, which is responsible for protecting and covering 77,000 sq. miles of Alaskan Frontier.

The Trooper Gabe Rich Memorial Bridge will stand to remind Alaskans of the dedication and the sacrifice that Trooper Rich made on their behalf.

Trooper Gabe Rich is survived by: his fiancé, Angie Rich; sons, Lenox and Malakai; parents, David and Patty Rich.

CHAIR HUGHES directed attention to the photo of Trooper Rich in the packets. She mentioned the zero fiscal note and asked how the signage would be handled.

[1:49:00 PM](#)

MR. MERCADO explained that the sign will be fabricated and installed when the bridge is next updated. The project will cover the cost of the signage.

CHAIR HUGHES asked when that might happen.

MR. MERCADO said he understands it will be in the next five years. He clarified that SB 84 is the companion to Representative Talerico's bill. He has been in contact with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and therefore knows more about the timeline.

SENATOR SHOWER asked for clarification that the family has been asked and is supportive of this effort. He noted that the committee was taken by surprise when it heard another bill to rename a bridge and the surviving spouse voiced reservations about the effort.

MR. MERCADO replied he has been working with the family to make sure they approve and there are four signature sheets indicating support for this effort. He described the overall support for renaming the bridge as very high.

CHAIR HUGHES noted that copies of the signature sheets were in the packets.

MS. MOSS clarified that her office began discussing renaming the Tok River Bridge (SB 4) with Brandy Johnson in October 2018 and Ms. Johnson never indicated she opposed the effort.

SENATOR SHOWER said he wasn't blaming anyone, but the miscommunication took everyone by surprise.

MS. MOSS said it has been a very emotional experience for Ms. Johnson and she prays for her.

[1:52:17 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony for SB 84.

[1:52:29 PM](#)

ANGIE RICH, representing Trooper Rich's family, Fairbanks, said the family definitely supports SB 84. Mr. Mercado has been very careful and diligent in his work with the family to make sure they support and are part of the process to rename the bridge. She said it's important to the family to know that Gabe will not be forgotten and that his name will be memorialized in a positive way. This peaceful site is traditional to Alaska and a place that is part of Gabe's childhood.

CHAIR HUGHES expressed appreciation for her testimony and all the things that Gabe did to make the state a safer place.

[1:54:38 PM](#)

RONALD WALL, Captain, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety, Fairbanks, said he was testifying on behalf of the agency to say that it was a pleasure to work with Trooper Rich. He worked patrol and rural and was pending a transfer to Southeast. Not only was he an outstanding trooper, he was also an exceptional father. He brought joy and happiness to those around him. The department supports SB 84, he said.

[1:56:27 PM](#)

DAVID RICH, representing self, Fairbanks, said he wanted to echo Angie's testimony. The family is proud that the state is doing this. It will live on with us as we cross that bridge, and it will be nice for others to see Gabe's name and remember him, he said.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked him for the sacrifice he made as a father.

[1:58:07 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES closed public testimony and held SB 84 in committee.

[1:58:35 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 1:58 p.m.