

REVENUE: No revenue impact

FISCAL: No fiscal impact

Action: Do Pass
Vote: 4 - 0 - 2
Yeas: Burdick, Edwards, Girod, Beyer
Nays: 0
Exc.: Atkinson, Starr
Prepared By: Richard Berger, Administrator
Meeting Dates: 4/14

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES: Repeals sunset on provisions allowing persons with limited vision who use a bioptic lens device to operate motor vehicles at night. Makes licensure contingent upon passing test to demonstrate ability to operate motor vehicle and examination by vision specialist. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Below average accident rate for limited vision drivers
- Additional training and testing required for limited vision drivers
- Need to drive at night for emergencies, employment, and social activities

EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT: No amendment.

BACKGROUND: A bioptic telescopic lens is a small second lens that fits over a regular eyeglass lens to provide added visual assistance. Bioptic lenses are used by people with eye conditions or eye diseases that reduce resolution of sight, but do not substantially alter peripheral vision; such conditions include cataracts, macular degeneration, and corneal diseases. A driver using such a bioptic lens would not be looking through the lens at all times, but would instead use it to occasionally read signs or obtain detail about objects.

Senate Bill 289 (2003) instituted a four-year pilot program that allowed the Department of Transportation to issue special limited vision learner permits, instructional permits, or drivers licenses to applicants with limited vision—between 20/80 and 20/200—who use bioptic lenses and meet other conditions. The pilot legislation required certification by a vision specialist, ensuring the person’s vision would not deteriorate below the limit, that the person had functional peripheral vision, and that the person would be aided by using the bioptic lens. It also required the person to pass certified training in the use of a bioptic lens for driving and to pass the written test. The program limited driving under the special permit or license to daylight hours on roads limited to 45 miles per hour or less. It also required the licensee to retake vision and driving tests every two years.

Senate Bill 728 (2007) repealed the sunset on the pilot program and eliminated the 45 miles per hour speed restriction. The measure also instituted another pilot program that allowed low-vision bioptic lens drivers to drive at night.