Oregon
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DATE: February 23, 2021

TO: Joint Committee on Transportation

FROM: Amy Joyce, Administrator, Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division
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SUBJECT: CORRECTED – House Bill 2137 – DMV Customer Service Package

INTRODUCTION

Like many organizations across Oregon, ODOT's Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division (DMV) has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hurt customer service. House Bill 2137, with the (-1) amendment, is a package of proposals intended to provide protection for Oregonians who have been unable to complete their DMV business, and eliminate unnecessary and duplicative tests resulting in better service for Oregonians and greater capacity in field offices.

BACKGROUND

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DMV field offices closed for 10 weeks to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus. Upon reopening, capacity was and continues to be constrained due to physical distancing requirements. Because most driver license transactions must be done in person, DMV prioritized those over vehicle title and registration transactions. Nearly all vehicle-related transactions were diverted to DMV Headquarters (via mail). This shift in the distribution of work between DMV Headquarters and field offices has resulted in a significant backlog of vehicle-related transactions. Even with additional temporary staff and overtime, headquarters is not appropriately staffed for this volume of work; about half of vehicle transactions used to be done in field. Another significant factor is that customers in the field are helped by staff to accurately complete paperwork and submit the right fee. With all transactions coming to headquarters, error rates are high, causing returns, corrections, and delays.

In response to this backlog, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 1601 during the 1st Special Session of 2020, providing a moratorium on certain driver and vehicle-related traffic violations between March 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. The DMV has since entered an agreement with law enforcement to refrain from enforcing these traffic violations between January 1, 2021 and April 30, 2021.

DISCUSSION

As a result of this transaction backlog, DMV estimates 100,000 vehicle-related transactions are pending completion. In addition, DMV data shows that many Oregonians have been delaying their driver-related transactions, such as renewals. As part of DMV's plan to work through this backlog of transactions, this proposal of legislative changes will make four changes:

1. Reinstating a rolling citation moratorium for 6 months after expiration, for the period between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021 (includes driver licenses, driver permits, disabled parking placards, and vehicle registration and permits);
2. Eliminate the knowledge test requirement for out-of-state driver license applicants, freeing up approximately 100,000 testing slots each year in field offices;
3. Eliminate a redundant knowledge test administered during the teen driver licensing process, freeing up approximately 35,000 testing slots each year in field offices; and
4. Extending the length of time an individual may renew their driver license after expiration without needing to re-test, from one year to two years.

First, sections 1-3 of the bill would reinstate a citation moratorium on certain driver and vehicle-related offenses. This "rolling" citation moratorium (based on the expiration date of the credential, rather than a blanket moratorium for a specific period of time), would provide a moratorium on certain traffic violations between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021, for driving privileges, vehicle registrations and permits, and disabled parking placards, expired fewer than 6 months. This proposal would allow individuals more time to get their appointment at a DMV field office or to receive their documents from DMV. This citation moratorium would take effective immediately, and sunset on January 1, 2022.

Second, section 4 would eliminate the requirement for out-of-state driver license applicants to take an Oregon knowledge test prior to issuance. Currently, Oregon statute requires an individual moving to Oregon from out-of-state take and pass an Oregon knowledge test prior to issuance. Oregon is one of only eight states with this requirement, and there is no evidence that these additional knowledge tests improve highway safety. ODOT-DMV administers over 100,000 of these knowledge tests every year. Elimination of this knowledge test requirement would free up critical space for other test customers in field offices. This proposal would take effect 30 days after passage.

Third, sections 5 and 6 would eliminate a redundant knowledge test administered during the teen driver licensing process. Prior to Oregon's graduated teen license structure, when an instruction permit and practicing with your parent were both optional, the Teen Safe Driving Practices Test was implemented as a final knowledge test prior to the issuance of full driving privileges. This test was intended as a final check on a teen's ability to safely drive. In 1999, Oregon implemented a graduated teen driver license system (mandatory instruction permit, preference for teens to complete a driver education course, mandatory practice time with a licensed adult, and a provisional license with restricted privileges), without repeal of the Teen Safe Driving Practices Test. This knowledge test has since become redundant, and no evidence exists suggesting this test has a meaningful impact on teen driver behavior. Rather, the permit, education, practice, and provisional licensing laws dramatically improved teen driving outcomes. Elimination of this redundant test requirement would eliminate approximately 35,000 tests per year, freeing up more capacity for other Oregonians in ODOT-DMV field offices. This proposal would take effect 30 days following passage.

Fourth, section 7 would extend the amount of time someone has to renew their driver license after expiration before needing to re-take tests. Currently, individuals may renew their driver license up to one year after expiration without retesting. However, if an individual waits more than one year after expiration to renew their license, they are required to start the driver licensing process over from the beginning. This includes taking and passing the knowledge, vision, and skills tests. ODOT-DMV data shows many Oregonians have not renewed their driver license since March 2020, likely because of not wanting to risk exposure to COVID-19 at a DMV field office, or because they are taking advantage of the citation moratorium or agreement with law enforcement. This proposal would change this **one year** limit to **two years**. This proposal would provide relief to Oregonians who would otherwise be required to re-start the driver license testing process, by providing them an additional year to renew their license. Additionally, this proposal would help ODOT-DMV avoid unnecessary re-testing of Oregonians, avoiding additional field office congestion. This proposal would take effect 30 days following passage.

SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant backlog of ODOT-DMV transactions. As part of ODOT-DMV's broader strategy to work through this backlog, House Bill 2137 would assist this effort by:

1. Reinstating a rolling citation moratorium for 6 months after expiration, for the period between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021 (includes driver licenses, driver permits, disabled parking placards, and vehicle registration and permits);
2. Eliminate the knowledge test requirement for out-of-state driver license applicants, freeing up approximately 100,000 testing slots each year in field offices;
3. Eliminate a redundant knowledge test administered during the teen driver licensing process, freeing up approximately 35,000 testing slots each year in field offices; and
4. Extending the length of time an individual may renew their driver license after expiration without needing to re-test, from one year to two years.

Passage of these proposals would provide critical relief to Oregonians. And it would eliminate unnecessary and duplicative work, so that ODOT-DMV can more quickly work through the backlog of transactions and better serve Oregonians.