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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N   A C T

RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- OPERATORS' AND CHAUFFEURS' LICENSES

Introduced By: Senators DiPalma, Zurier, Acosta, McKenney, and Paolino

Date Introduced: March 14, 2025

Referred To: Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1   SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2   (1) The Rhode Island department of education has temporarily authorized driver education

3 schools to deliver the thirty-three (33) hour community college of Rhode Island approved driver

4 training curriculum in an instructor-led virtual format since April, 2020.

5   (2) The virtual platform used to present the curriculum allows the instructor to see students

6 on-screen and monitor student engagement by providing spot quizzes, interactive question and

7 answer sessions, class polling and final exam.

8   (3) Scores for exams taken in a classroom setting (pre-pandemic) and those taken virtually

9 are comparable (90.94 on average for in-person vs. 89.58 on average for virtual).

10   (4) Virtual instruction can provide workable alternatives to students with physical,

11 emotional, or other learning challenges.

12   (5) A virtual instruction option promotes greater accessibility to the curriculum advancing

13 equity and inclusion.

14   (6) A virtual option can be particularly important in rural areas or Rhode Island

15 communities where no classroom instruction is available.

16   SECTION 2. Section 31-10-20 of the General Laws in Chapter 31-10 entitled "Operators'

17 and Chauffeurs' Licenses" is hereby amended to read as follows:

18   **31-10-20. Driver education course requirement before licensing.**

1   (a) No limited-instruction permit or license shall be issued to any person not more than

2   eighteen (18) years of age unless that person shall have successfully completed a course of

3   instruction as provided in § 31-10-19, or a similar course of instruction, conducted in a classroom

4   setting or in an instructor-led virtual format, recognized by the state board of education as

5   equivalent to it. The instructor-led virtual format course shall be permitted until July 1, 2027 and a

6   report analyzing the test results of the instructor-led virtual instruction format as compared to the

7   in-person classroom instruction format shall be provided by the state board of education, to the

8   speaker of the house and president of the senate no later than September 1, 2027. However, any

9   person who is over eighteen (18) years of age and has been a holder of a motor vehicle operator's

10   license issued to that person by any other state, territory, or possession of the United States, or any

11   other sovereignty for a period of one year immediately prior to his or her application for a license

12   under this chapter shall not be required to comply with the provisions of this section.

13   (b) Commencing on July 1, 2004, no limited-instruction permit or license shall be issued

14   to any person not more than eighteen (18) years of age unless that person shall have successfully

15   completed a course of instruction as provided in § 31-10-19, or a similar course of instruction in

16   another state recognized by the state board of education as equivalent to it. In determining whether

17   a course is equivalent, the state board of education shall at a minimum require: (1) That the course

18   consist of at least thirty-three (33) instructional hours that substantially conform with the current

19   curriculum utilized by the instructor(s) at the Community College of Rhode Island, including a

20   minimum of three (3) hours of instruction focusing upon specific Rhode Island traffic laws, the

21   specific requirements of the Rhode Island graduated-licensing statute in § 31-10-6, and eight (8)

22   hours specifically for instruction on the effects of alcohol and drugs on a driver. All driver's

23   education programs shall include information concerning the Revised Uniform Anatomical Gift

24   Act, chapter 18.6.1 of title 23, and information on donor cards pursuant to the applicable provisions

25   of chapter 18.6.1 of title 23; (2) That the instructor holds a valid teacher's certificate; (3) That the

26   instructor satisfactorily completes at least a three-credit (3) course in traffic safety education at an

27   accredited institution of higher education; and (4) That the program does not offer outside the

28   classroom road test instruction or driving lessons to Rhode Island students. However, any person

29   who is over eighteen (18) years of age and has been a holder of a motor vehicle operator's license

30   issued to that person by any other state, territory, or possession of the United States, or any other

31   sovereignty for a period of one year immediately prior to his or her application for a license under

32   this chapter shall not be required to comply with the provisions of this section.

33   (c) The driver's education course and driver's license examination shall include material

34   pertaining to a driver's rights and responsibilities when stopped by a law enforcement officer as

1 explained during the driver education course, including, but not limited to, rights provided to

2 drivers pursuant to chapter 21.2 of title 31, the "comprehensive community-police relationship act

3 of 2015."

4   SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION

BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

OF

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1   This act would permit the continuation of instructor-led virtual instruction for drivers'

2   education until July 1, 2027, the board of education would be required to provide a report

3   comparing test scores of virtual versus in-person instruction to the speaker of the house and

4   president of the senate no later than September 1, 2027.

5   This act would take effect upon passage.

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