

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
One strong united voice for Minnesota workers

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March 16, 2022

Dear Honorable Members of the Transportation Committee:

We are writing to share our thoughts on HF 4164. We would like to thank Rep. Elkins for carrying this important piece of legislation, and we'd like to thank those that put together the Independent Expert Review: Rick King, Amy Albus, Jenni Hein, and Theresa Wise. We hope that this report, in concert with the OLA report from 2021, can provide important direction for both DVS and deputy registrars. AFSCME strives to be part of a functional, responsive system that is modern, nimble, and accountable, while maintaining the important role of the public sector in regulating our transportation systems. We hope our comments can be considered and incorporated into a final DVS omnibus bill, and we want to make sure that the committee knows that our concerns with the Independent Expert Review are not a reflection of the quality of their work.

We are very pleased to support various provisions of this bill. We enthusiastically support the inclusion of the IER's recommendation to consider improvements for the security of deputy registrars and DVS facilities, as well as training for de-escalation and negotiation techniques. The Governor has proposed that DVS receive \$1.6 million over the next three years to install security cameras, and we'd request that Rep. Elkins and Chair Hornstein consider making that change. Challenges with MNDRIIVE as well as the issues of operating these public sites throughout the COVID-19 pandemic led to quite a bit of frustration directed at DVS staff, particularly at exam stations. We certainly understand the frustration that members of the public have, and we also want everybody to receive the correct services in a timely and respectful manner. That being said, our members deserve to be safe. If a member of the public threatens physical violence against workers that are not to blame and are being worked to the bone, they deserve to be held accountable.

We are broadly supportive of the provisions of the bill, including nearly all of the recommendations for exam stations listed in the IER, as well as expanding pre-applications and allowing online applications for class D licenses. Many of these proposed changes are necessary to modernize DVS and to make the lives of staff easier, and we are grateful for their inclusion. In particular, we support taking a look at the pass/fail rates of driving schools because driver preparedness is among the biggest factors into the backlog for class D and CDL licenses. We also could be supportive of some of the changes to the filing fees for mail-in transactions and the creation of the full-service provider account, depending on the fiscal note and the interaction with increased license fees. DVS has, like so many other departments and employers, a tough time hiring and retaining workers since there is such a tight labor market, and it's also very demanding work because of the sheer quantity of license exams to complete and vehicle registrations to process. Steps that improve the department's ability to hire a full complement of staff are definitely welcome, but we also need DVS to have enough funding to not only retain or replace current staff, but also hire additional examiners and counter staff to make further inroads into the backlog. We would also note that many of these proposed changes could be better implemented with input from all interested parties, in order to ensure that everybody's needs are met satisfactorily. For example, consolidating exam stations would be more efficient than the current practices of having all 91 exam stations open, but further steps could be taken to make sure that those taking CDL exams could be given some priority in select locations, thereby addressing the concerns of the Minnesota Trucking Association without having to resort to more widespread third-party testing.

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We do have some concerns about the bill. We are opposed to the inclusion of the report on third-party testers for license exams. These firmly believe that some services must be performed by the public sector in order to protect their integrity, and administering road tests is certainly among them. Part of maintaining some of the safest roads in the country means ensuring that our young drivers are ready to be on the roads. We feel that the best course of action is to make sure that everybody that schedules a test takes it, provide access to an affordable driving school so that everyone shows up ready to pass their test on the first or second try, and fully staff the department so people can get a test in a timely manner where they live, though we recognize that this isn't a budget year. Furthermore, we would note that third-party testers were evaluated as an option in the OLA report for DVS exam stations of 2021, and they were ultimately not part of the recommendations of that report. Utilizing additional resources to evaluating this idea isn't necessary.

We also have some concerns over some of the recommendations that would automate various services within DVS. We acknowledge the need to make this department more modern, as well as others. But we are also dealing with a worker shortage. Workers that could be displaced by these changes must have an opportunity to receive retraining to fill vacant roles in DVS or find equivalent work in another department so they can retain their seniority, their pension, and their health care. This is absolutely critical for these workers and could also help to address the problem of short staffing across many state agencies.

Lastly, we just want to remind the committee that our members at DVS have been working in overdrive for the past three years. The work of performing road exams only stopped for a couple of months at the beginning of the pandemic, and throughout the pandemic, DVS actually increased the number of tests performed to well beyond pre-COVID levels. That meant overtime, later hours, working on weekends, and now an indefinite shift to being open on weekends in the metro area. These members need a significant investment into their jobs, not only to fill vacant positions, but to expand the overall number of examiners in the metro area, and even to open additional sites. Without that investment, we feel that our members are being set up to fail.

Thank you all for considering these comments, and please reach out to us with questions about any details of the bill that aren't addressed in this letter.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Bleyhl". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Julie Bleyhl
Executive Director
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