

SUBJECT: Expiration of drivers licenses

COMMITTEE: Public Safety — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Oakley, Driver, Keel, Keffer, Madden, McClendon, Reyna
0 nays
2 absent — Carter, Olivo

WITNESSES: For — None
Against — None
On — Kevin Cooper, Texas Department of Public Safety

BACKGROUND : Texas driver’s licenses expire on the driver's birthday four years after the card is issued. Renewing or changing information on a license costs \$16. Personal identification certificates cost \$10 for persons under 65 and \$5 for older individuals. The Department of Public Safety (DPS) is authorized to specify expiration dates for ID certificates.

DIGEST: CSHB 1200 would amend the Transportation Code to provide that a driver's license or ID certificate would expire on the first birthday of the licensee or cardholder after the sixth anniversary of the application date. DPS could establish rules providing for the staggered expiration of licenses, permits and certificates.

The bill would also increase fees for licenses and ID certificates. Fees for renewing most driver’s licenses would increase from \$16 to \$24. Fees for licenses to operate motorcycles or mopeds would increase from \$21 to \$32, while licenses that allowed the holder to operate both automobiles and motorcycles and mopeds would incur an additional \$8 fee. The fee for commercial drivers license would increase from \$40 to \$60.

Fees for personal identification certificates would be changed to \$15 for persons under 60. Certificates issued to a person over age 60 would not expire.

CSHB 1200 would take effect September 1, 1997, and apply only to a license, permit, or certificate issued or renewed on or after the effective date.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 1200 would cut down on long waiting lines at DPS offices and provide better customer service. DPS now processes 4.2 million new applications and renewal forms each year at a cost of \$1.2 million. There is no reason to update this information every four years at such an expense. Texas licenses now use such modern technology as magnetic strips and bar codes, enabling police officers to verify a driver's eligibility and legal standing almost instantly.

The six-year renewal proposal is more feasible than the comptroller's recommendation for lifetime licenses with updates of information every 12 years. The integrity of lifetime documents would be compromised and could impair several public safety programs. Furthermore, driver safety would be threatened because DPS employees could not screen motorists at regular intervals for physical limitations or test them for visual and hearing impairments. In addition, a person's appearance can change dramatically in 12 years.

License formats change frequently. With 12-year cycles, many different formats could be in circulation simultaneously, causing confusion to retail and law enforcement communities. The deterioration of the magnetic strip on the lifetime license also would create significant problems for the retail, banking and credit industries that rely on drivers licenses to verify a customer's identity.

Warrant service activity also would be impaired if lifetime licenses were implemented. The new "Failure to Appear" program that allows DPS to deny driver's license renewal to individuals for outstanding municipal traffic citations would be made ineffective, at an estimated annual loss of \$5 million in state funds and \$36 million in local warrant fees beginning in 2002. Jury selection also would be affected by outdated driver's licenses, and eliminating renewal could result in decreased designation of organ donors on the license.

The savings estimated in the comptroller's recommendation for lifetime licensing could not be realized. For one thing, licensing personnel would

not be reduced 25 percent as envisioned, and DPS would lose \$41 million in revenue under the municipal traffic warrant service program. Furthermore, the program would impose additional costs on DPS, such as \$4 million annually to update licenses at 12-year intervals, and \$1.5 million to rewrite the license issuance software and an undetermined increase in per document cost under the DPS contract with Polaroid for issuing licenses.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The issuance of lifetime driver's licenses, as recommended by the Texas Performance Review in its latest report, *Disturbing the Peace*, would lead to even more customer convenience, eliminate walk-in traffic and long lines in DPS offices, and reduce the costs of postage and processing applications and renewals. The comptroller's recommendations should be followed so that lifetime licenses are issued with updates at 12-year intervals to include changes in pertinent information.

NOTES:

The original version of HB 1200 provided for expiration of a driver's license or personal identification card at age 60, with free updates at 12-year intervals. The original version also would have imposed onetime fees ranging from \$16 to \$85, depending on the applicant's age, and allowed installment payments over a period of one year.

The companion bills, SB 602 by Armbrister and SB 880 by Brown, are pending in the Senate State Affairs Committee.