
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anthony Portantino, Chair
2023 - 2024 Regular Session

AB 1606 (Gipson) - Driver's license renewal alternatives

Version: April 26, 2023

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 14, 2023

Policy Vote: TRANS. 16 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: AB 1606 would authorize the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to establish a program to evaluate the traffic safety and other effects of renewing driver's licenses by virtual or other remote processes, as specified, until January 1, 2035.

Fiscal Impact:

- One-time DMV costs, likely in the range of \$100,000 to \$150,000 over the 2024-25 and 2025-26 fiscal years, to develop and adopt regulations specifying the parameters and procedures associated with implementing virtual or remote processes for renewing driver's licenses, including submitting vision exams, taking knowledge tests remotely, and establishing processes for verifying the authenticity of tests. (Motor Vehicle Account)
- Unknown one-time DMV costs, potentially minor and up to the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, likely in the 2026-27 fiscal year, to make any necessary programmatic IT modifications necessary to implement the virtual and remote processes for renewing driver's licenses, as specified in the bill. Staff notes that DMV is currently undertaking a multi-year Enterprise Modernization Project, the Digital eXperience Project (DXP) that will not be completed until 2025-26. Any IT modifications resulting from this bill would be implemented after the DXP is complete, and actual costs would depend upon the functionality of the new systems. (Motor Vehicle Account)
- Unknown, significant DMV ongoing administrative cost savings from fiscal years 2026-27 to 2034-35 as a result of the elimination of in-person field office visits. DMV indicates that approximately one million individuals renew driver's licenses in-person in a DMV field office each year that would have the option to renew remotely under this bill. Actual ongoing cost savings would depend upon the number of eligible drivers who elect to renew driver's licenses remotely, and the cost savings associated with verifying information programmatically rather than conducting vision and knowledge testing in-person. (Motor Vehicle Account)
- DMV indicates costs to prepare and submit the report to the Legislature by January 1, 2034 would be minor and absorbable. (Motor Vehicle Account)

Background: Existing law prescribes the processes and procedures for the issuance and renewal of driver's licenses, and requires a person to renew their driver license every five years. Existing law authorizes DMV to permit renewal of a driver's license by mail twice every fifteen years, but prohibits DMV from authorizing renewal by mail for a person 70 years of age or older, a person who has negative operation points on their

license, or a person with certain driving related convictions. Existing law authorizes DMV to require applicants who are renewing their driver's license to take an examination deemed appropriate by the DMV considering the licensee's record of convictions and accidents or evidence of a condition affecting the ability of the applicant to safely operate a motor vehicle. DMV is prohibited from making this determination solely on the basis of an individual's age.

In October of 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom, acting under emergency powers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, temporarily waived the statutory requirement that a driver 70 years of age or older must renew their driver's license at a DMV field office. Subsequently, SB 174 (Committee on Budget), Chap.254/2021, suspended the requirement that an individual 70 years of age or older renew their driver's license in person every five years and allowed such a driver to renew their license online until January 1, 2023.

On March 17th, 2022 DMV began offering online options for customers who need to take a driver's license knowledge test by allowing them to complete the requirement at home before visiting a DMV field office. The test is available in 35 languages and requires customers to have an internet-enabled computer or laptop (not a tablet or mobile device) with a webcam that must be turned on during the entire test. DMV permits applicants to take the test online twice, and after that requires them to come into a DMV field office in person.

Proposed Law: AB 1606 would authorize DMV to establish a program to evaluate the traffic safety and other effects of renewing driver's licenses by virtual or other remote processes, in lieu of submitting an application at a field office, until January 1, 2035. The bill specifies that the program established under the authority provided by this bill would require all individuals 80 years of age or older to come into a field office to renew their license, and a renewal by mail or on the internet under the program would not be granted to a person 70 years of age or older without a visual test.

The bill would require DMV to submit a report to the Legislature by January 1, 2034 that includes:

- The steps that DMV took to prevent individuals other than the applicant from taking the knowledge test.
- The number of individuals on an annual basis that opted to take the knowledge examination virtually or by other remote processes.
- The number of individuals that opted to take the visual test virtually.
- The process that DMV used to verify the authenticity of the tests.

Related Legislation: AB 174 (Committee on Budget), Chap. 254/2021, included a provision that temporarily suspended the requirement for individuals 70 years of age and older to renew their license in-person every five years until January 1, 2023.

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