Licensing Operators and Chauffeurs

Explanatory Notes on
Act III of the Uniform Vehicle Code

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE on Street and Highway Safety was organized in 1924 under the chairmanship of Secretary of Commerce Hoover General sessions of the Conference were held in December, 1924, and March, 1926, at which a comprehensive program for traffic improvement was adopted, including a Uniform Vehicle Code of proposed state laws The Conference has also prepared a Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance for use of cities and towns

These reports, as well as other material bearing on the traffic program, are obtainable from the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety, 1615 H Street, N W, Washington, D C, or directly from any of the following associations cooperating in the organization and financing of the Conference:

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Chamber of Commerce of the United States
Motor and Equipment Association
National Association of Taxicab Owners
National Automobile Chamber of Commerce
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National Safety Council

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LICENSING OPERATORS AND CHAUFFEURS

Explanatory Notes on Act III of the Uniform Vehicle Code

THE Uniform Vehicle Code developed by the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety in collaboration with the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, and endorsed by the American Bar Association, is divided for convenience into four Acts as follows:

- A Uniform Motor Vehicle Registration Act
- A Uniform Motor Vehicle Anti-Theft Act
- A Uniform Operators' and Chauffeurs' License Act
- A Uniform Act Regulating the Operation of Vehicles on Highways

Supplementing the fourth Act there has been developed a Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance, which affords municipalities opportunity to carry the principle of uniformity into the local regulations not ordinarily deemed coverable by state law

This pamphlet relates to the third or Operators' and Chauffeurs' License Act, and its purpose is to set forth and explain the reasons which led to adoption of the various provisions of the Act.

There can no longer be doubt as to the efficacy of a law requiring that no unlicensed person be permitted to operate a motor vehicle, and that all new candidates for an operator's or chauffeur's license must pass an examination to obtain this Such a law has been in effect for several years in some eleven states, and in practically all cases these states show a more favorable accident record than the average for all states A small percentage of incompetent applicants fail after repeated examinations, and are forever kept off the highways. A much larger percentage, failing once, pass ultimately, but only after diligent work to learn the regulations and the principles of safe driving

Undoubtedly another considerable number of persons who would be a menace at the driver's wheel are deterred from applying through consciousness of their inability to pass the tests The requirement for formal application and examination serves a useful purpose with respect to those who prove themselves qualified to drive Such applicants familiarize themselves with the regulations They are impressed with the public concern in safe driving They appreciate the value of the license certificate issued by the state A license law such as is proposed has another important feature in the provisions for suspension and revocation of licenses to remove from the highways those who, after receiving licenses, prove themselves incompetent and cause accidents or commit serious violations of the motor vehicle laws.

No state having once established the licensing system has abandoned it. On the contrary, the tendency in such states is strongly in support of the licensing system including the examination.

(Detailed information as to the tangible results of the licensing system in improved accident records, and the simplicity with which the system can be administered, is contained in the following publications obtainable from the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety: "What Can We Expect of Drivers' License Laws," an analysis of the effect of such existing laws on the accident records; "Weeding Out the Worthless Driver," a discussion of the operation of license laws; "Shall We Go All the Way?" a discussion of the effects of modern motor vehicle regulation)

While exact uniformity is less important in laws governing the licensing of operators and chauffeurs than in rules of the road, the Uniform Operators' and Chauffeurs' License Act has been developed after careful consideration of the provisions being applied successfully in the license states, and each section in the Act is believed to serve a definite purpose Uniformity will certainly be of great convenience to vehicle operators

Definitions

Section 1 of the Act contains the definitions It is suggested that the other provisions of the Act be read without prior detailed consideration of the definitions Standing alone these definitions might be misunderstood or raise questions, but they are prepared to fit the context of the Act Consequently, while a given term might with equal logic be defined in several ways, changes in the definitions, as presented in Section 1, without regard to the Act might alter the meaning of a provision of the Act in a manner not desired It is suggested that, upon reading the various provisions, if any question arises as to the meaning of a term, reference then be made to the particular definition to determine whether or not the provision is clear and explicit and means what is intended

Operators and Chauffeurs Must Be Licensed

Section 2 is a fundamental provision of the Act, that no person with the exception of certain ones expressly exempted in subsequent sections may operate a motor vehicle either as a private operator or as a chauffeur without having obtained a license to do so The reasons for such a requirement have already been outlined in the preceding pages, and are set forth in greater detail in pamphlets to which reference has been made

What Persons Are Exempt

It is recognized that certain persons can and should under certain conditions be exempt from the license requirement Paragraph (a) of Section 3 exempts persons driving or operating road or farm machinery temporarily on the highways. It is obvious that the operator of such machinery does not have the opportunity to commit many of the violations which endanger the safety of others or interfere with the ordinary movement of traffic and that it is not necessary, therefore, that he be able to pass the test imposed upon operators of ordinary motor vehicles

Such a test, furthermore, would not insure that he could operate the special machinery in a safe manner

Persons in the service of the Army, Navy or Marine Corps of the United States are exempted in paragraph (b) of Section 3, but only when furnished with a driver's permit and when operating an official motor vehicle in that service. It is recognized that the state authorities cannot interfere with the operations of these branches of the Federal Government and it is to be assumed that these Federal agencies will adopt whatever safeguards are necessary to qualify the operators of their vehicles

Non-Residents

Section 4 recognizes the principle of reciprocity which is an important feature of uniform vehicle legislation. It recognizes in paragraph (a) an operator's license duly issued in one state as of equal value in any other state. With respect to states which do not at present require licenses it also permits drivers from those states to operate in the state in question for a period of not to exceed thirty days in one year without obtaining a license, after which the non-resident must obtain a license in order to continue to operate in that state.

While this leniency to non-residents may for a short period permit persons to operate in a state who could not pass the examinations, it is felt that the value of the reciprocity thus accorded overshadows the danger arising from these unlicensed operators, and it is recognized that as more states adopt licensing laws these dangers are decreased

The Section in both paragraphs (a) and (b), however, requires that the non-resident to operate with or without a license from his native state must be at least sixteen years old. The Act establishes sixteen years as the minimum age at which a person can safely be permitted to drive a motor vehicle, and does not extend the reciprocity to younger persons from other states.

Paragraph (b) furthermore assumes that the non-resident from a state not having a license law is in fact as

well as in law only a visitor, and in extending him the courtesy of permitting him to drive his own vehicle, properly registered for the current year in his own state, does not permit him to drive a vehicle registered in the state he is visiting or in any other state. This restriction serves as a check upon the misuse of the reciprocity provision as applied to visitors from states not requiring a driver's license.

What Persons Shall Not Be Licensed

As noted above, the Act expressly prohibits any person under sixteen years of age from operating a motor vehicle and paragraph (a) of Section 5 prohibits such a person from obtaining a license. The paragraph also makes the minimum age limit for a chauffeur's license eighteen years. While it is recognized that age limits are necessarily arbitrary, and that any limit is likely to exclude some competent operators and admit others that are incompetent, and also that some of the states have established limits considerably under sixteen and one or two deem sixteen too young, the limits established in the Act are believed to represent the consensus of the best opinion

Paragraph (b) of Section 5 prohibits the premature restoration of a license that has been suspended or revoked In the case of a suspension, the period of the suspension cannot be reduced. In the case of a revocation the period cannot in any event be less than one year. This provision is deemed important to relieve the Motor Vehicle Commissioner from pressure to ameliorate or nullify penalties imposed for cause

Habitual drunkards and persons addicted to the use of narcotic drugs are prohibited in paragraph (c) from obtaining licenses It is recognized that such persons operating while under the influence of liquor or drugs are a serious menace to traffic, and severe penalties are imposed for such operation It is further recognized, however, that the only certain way to prevent such addicts from operating while under the influence of liquor or drugs is to bar them from obtaining licenses

Paragraph (d) has been worded with care to exclude persons who are insane or otherwise mentally incompetent and at the same time make it possible for persons who have been so afflicted but have been restored to competency to obtain licenses. The necessity of preventing mentally incompetent persons from operating motor vehicles needs no argument. In fairness, however, to those who have been temporarily so afflicted, it is felt that the provision should not be so drawn up so as to prevent them permanently from obtaining licenses. It should be noted that the Vehicle Commissioner is to be the judge as to whether such an afflicted person declared to be restored to competency is qualified to operate a motor vehicle safely.

Paragraph (e) prohibits the issuing of a license to a person deemed by the Commissioner to be so afflicted with physical or mental disability or diseases as to prevent him from exercising reasonable and ordinary control over the motor vehicle. The question of issuing licenses to such persons is a serious one. A simple solution would be to exclude all such persons, but careful study of the performance of many of them indicate that it is quite possible that the absence of an arm or a leg or perfect hearing may be fully compensated for by greater alertness, the sharpness of other faculties and a keen sense of responsibility. The provision is, therefore, worded to give the Vehicle Commissioner wide latitude in passing upon such applicants

The last clause, however, of paragraph (e) prohibits the issuing of a license to a person who is unable to understand highway warning or direction signs in the English language It is apparent that the safe movement of traffic under modern conditions, both in the country and in the cities, depends very largely on instantaneous understanding and strict observance of traffic signs and word signals and markings The provision does not necessitate any considerable amount of schooling, but specifically requires that the candidate must be able to read or understand highway signs.

Age Limits for Drivers of School Buses and Public Vehicles

It was previously noted that Section 4 establishes a minimum age of eighteen years for a chauffeur. Section 6 increases this age to twenty-one years when applied to a vehicle in use as a public passenger carrying vehicle. It is obvious that the operator of a bus or taxicab has a heavy responsibility for the safety of his passengers, and it is believed this work should not be intrusted to persons under twenty-one. This age limit is in accord with the experience and practice of the leading taxicab companies.

In the case, however, of school buses, it is recognized that, particularly in rural areas, it is customary for one of the older pupils to drive a bus and gather up the younger pupils. This use of buses to serve pupils in public schools is primarily on the rural highways where the hazards of operating are less numerous and complex, and the Act deems eighteen years a safe age for such operators, and so provides.

Instruction Permits

Wherever the license system is in effect, means must be afforded beginners to learn to operate in order that they may qualify for licenses. This practice in driving must generally, of necessity, be done on the public highways. Section 7 safeguards it as far as is deemed feasible by requiring that such a beginner shall first obtain a temporary instruction permit and that he may then operate a vehicle when accompanied by a licensed operator or chauffeur who is actually occupying a seat beside him. It is further required that there shall be no other person in the vehicle. The section authorizes the Vehicle Department to issue the instruction permit "in its discretion," thus making it possible for the Department to exclude, even as a beginner, any person not deemed to meet the minimum of requirements.

Application for License

Section 8 is a standard provision that applications for licenses shall be made on approved forms furnished by the

Department and shall be sworn to. It also stipulates that the form shall contain basic information regarding the applicant, including any licensing experience or record in that state or any other state

Application of Minors

As an additional safeguard against licensing persons too young to operate safely, Section 9 prohibits applicants between the ages of sixteen (the absolute minimum) and eighteen from obtaining a license unless the application is signed by the father of the applicant, if living, and having custody of him, otherwise by the guardian having custody, or, only in the event that there is no living father, mother or guardian, by the applicant's employer This section applies only to the granting of operators' licenses No chauffeur's license is granted in any event to a person under eighteen.

The requirement that the parent or guardian sign the application before a license will be issued serves several useful purposes. A parent by refusing to sign may prevent issuance of a license to a minor when the parent feels that the minor is not competent, or for some other reason does not wish the child to drive. As indicated in the note to the Section, it is a parental certification as to the age of the child While the parent may refuse to sign, thus preventing the issuance of a license, if the parent does sign the application, then under Section 22 financial responsibility is incurred with respect to those who may be injured through the negligent driving of the minor and thus protection is afforded the public.

Examination of Applicants

The Act is developed on the principle that the license is not merely a registration of the operator but that it is granted only on proof of his knowledge of the driving rules and ability to operate with reasonable safety. Therefore, Section 10 definitely provides for the examination of applicants.

Paragraph (a) sets forth the general conditions of the examination, leaving it to the Department to work out the details. It requires that the Department shall examine the applicant as to his physical and mental qualifications to operate a vehicle safely, and as to whether any facts exist which would bar him under Section 5, but the Department is to exclude from consideration facts not pertinent to either of these points

Paragraph (b) authorizes the Department "in its discretion" to waive the examination of any person applying for the renewal of a license issued under the Act This does not preclude the Department from requiring a candidate for renewal to qualify by further examination, but is in accord with the intent of the Act not to subject the experienced and safe driver to unnecessary annoyance or the state to unnecessary expense

In paragraph (c), alternate provisions are offered The first version is intended to apply in the state which already had a licensing Act which is superseded by the present Act In such a case the Department is permitted in its discretion to issue licenses without examination to any applicant qualified under the new Act who already has an unrevoked license issued either in this state or any other state. The second or alternate provision applies to states not previously requiring a license. It extends that discretion of the Department so that it may issue a license without examination to any applicant of sufficient age applying within three months who furnishes satisfactory evidence that he has operated a motor vehicle safely within the state for not less than one year

The purposes of both of these paragraphs is the same There will be many persons who at the time of the passage of the licensing law have been operating a motor vehicle successfully and safely for an extended period. It is recognized that to require them to submit to examination would work a hardship on them and cause much resentment, and that furthermore it would involve a great administrative burden and expense upon the state even if the examination were of a simple character. It is the intent of the Act that

the State Department waive the examination of those previously licensed, or having satisfactory driving experience in case the law did not previously require a license, but as to those beginning to drive after the Act takes effect, examination shall be mandatory.

Designation of Local Officers

It is felt imperative that the examination of applicants for licenses be under the direction of the Motor Vehicle Department so that the standards will be the same throughout the state

It is appreciated, however, that in states of large area or where the State Department has a limited personnel, it may be necessary as a matter of convenience to applicants to permit the Department to call upon sheriffs, chiefs of police or other agencies to assist it by conducting examinations The Act so permits It is recognized, however, that examinations by local agencies are ordinarily not desirable as opening the door to local pressure or favoritism influencing approval of the application, and it is recommended that where possible the examination be conducted by state traffic officers or inspectors or other officers under the direct supervision of the Department of Motor Vehicles In case local officials are used as examiners, they are required by the Act to conduct their examinations in accordance with the provisions of the Act and to make a written report of their findings and recommendations to the Department

Registration of Operators and Chauffeurs

Section 12 is a provision of obvious importance, that all applications and licenses issued shall be filed and indexed by name and number. The record must also include applications denied and licenses suspended or revoked. All of these lists are evidently necessary to maintain a proper record and insure against granting of licenses to persons who should not receive them

The maintenance by the Department of a record of operators and chauffeurs is also of primary importance in con-

nection with other provisions of the Code requiring report of convictions and report of accidents to the Department. In fact, from the administrative standpoint, it is most desirable that the record of each operator and chauffeur be so maintained as to disclose immediately upon inspection all essential facts, including the licensee's record of accidents and convictions of offenses under the Act.

Licenses Issued

Section 13 includes details of the license as issued Operators' and chauffeurs' licenses are differentiated While a chauffeur's license permits its owner to operate either as a chauffeur or as a private operator, an operator's license with its lesser requirements does not permit its owner to operate as a chauffeur

The information on the operator's license must include the owner's name, age, resident address and a brief description of the licensee. The chauffeur's license must in addition bear the photograph of the licensee. This latter requirement is deemed important with respect to chauffeurs because of the likelihood that the chauffeur will not have a permanent address and cannot as readily be located as the person who operates his own vehicle. The requirement of a photograph has not been found necessary for operators other than chauffeurs and to apply it to all such operators would involve an unwarranted volume of work and expense

Consideration has been given to the question whether every chauffeur should be required to wear a badge or button. It has been felt that such requirement would work hardship on persons who while coming within the range of the definition of chauffeur in the Act, nevertheless perform other important duties for their employers. It was further felt that it was not necessary to require chauffeurs in private employ to wear such a badge, but that one should in all cases be required for persons operating public or common carriers, and that where required the badge must be displayed in plain sight. The Section so provides. It also provides that the badge shall be of metal with readable distinguishing numbers

Paragraph (d) of Section 13 authorizes the Department to issue a temporary driver's permit good for a period of ten days to an applicant found to be mentally and physically qualified. This makes it possible for the Department to enable an operator believed to be properly qualified to operate a vehicle while, either because the investigation of the operator's record has not been fully completed or for any other reason, it is not feasible or desirable to grant him a permanent license immediately.

Duplicate License Certificates and Badges

Owing to the possibility of licenses or badges being lost or destroyed, Section 14 is inserted to permit the issue of duplicates or substitutes. Satisfactory proof must be furnished that the license or badge actually has been lost or destroyed, and an established fee to cover the cost of replacement must be paid

License to Be Signed and Carried

Section 15 provides that each operator must write his usual signature in pen and ink on the license in a blank space provided for the purpose, and a chauffeur across the face of his photograph A license will not be valid until so signed The importance of such a provision to safeguard against transfer of a license is obvious It is further provided in Section 15 that the licensee must always have the license in his immediate possession while driving a motor vehicle and shall display it upon demand recognition, however, of the likelihood that a licensee may sometimes inadvertently fail to have the license with him. the Act makes it a defense to a charge under the provision that the person so charged produce a proper license in court, valid at the time of his arrest

Expiration of Licenses

Alternate provisions regarding the expiration of licenses are offered as Section 16. The preferred provision is that chauffeurs' licenses shall expire and must be renewed at the end of each year, but that other operators' licenses shall not expire more frequently than once in three years, the Department in each case having authority either to reexamine or waive examination before granting a renewal It is felt that in the case of a private operator making the period not less than three years will keep down the expense of administration and at the same time safeguard sufficiently against change in the physical or mental condition of the licensee which would make it unsafe for him to operate a motor vehicle. In the case of chauffeurs, however, it is felt that a check upon them each year is advisable

The alternative section simply provides that all licenses shall expire annually and requires that they be renewed, December 31 being the date of expiration provided. This alternate section is inserted in recognition of the fact that a similar provision is now found in the laws of a number of states

Convictions, Suspensions and Revocations

Careful consideration has been given to the question of whether the courts should be empowered, as they are in some states, to suspend or revoke licenses. The consensus of opinion appears to be that the power of suspension and revocation should be vested solely in the Vehicle Department. Section 17 so provides, but requires the courts to report convictions for motor vehicle or traffic offenses, and furthermore authorizes the courts to recommend the suspension or revocation of licenses of persons convicted. The Vehicle Department is called upon to consider such recommendations and act upon them as it deems desirable

Mandatory Revocation

After certain major offenses, however, neither the courts nor the Vehicle Department are given discretion. Revocation of the license is mandatory. These offenses, six in number, are enumerated in Section 19 It is felt that these offenses are so serious that the courts and the Vehicle Department are to be protected against any possibility of un-

due influence to relieve the offender of the full responsibility for his act.

In the event a person whose license has been suspended or revoked shall in violation of law operate a vehicle during the period of such suspension or revocation, then the Department shall immediately extend the period of such first suspension or revocation for an additional like period.

Department May Suspend or Revoke Licenses

While the Department is required in Section 17 to consider recommendations from the court to suspend the licenses of persons convicted, it is not felt that the Department should be required to form its conclusions solely on the court's records. Section 19 empowers the Department immediately to suspend a license without a hearing or record of conviction if for reasons enumerated it deems it unsafe to permit such persons to continue to operate Unless the Department has such power a dangerous driver could continue to drive during the period of trial for a very serious offense irrespective of how palpably guilty he might be and how dangerous as a motor vehicle operator

When a license has been so suspended it is provided that a licensee must immediately be notified and be given a hearing if he desires it in the county where he resides, and the Department is required to determine on the basis of the hearing whether it should rescind its previous action or continue the period of suspension or revoke the license. This is in harmony with the right of review recognized in Section 20 referred to later.

In order that the Department may have the necessary control over persons licensed in other states, it is empowered in paragraph (b) to suspend or revoke the right of any non-resident to operate a motor vehicle within the state in question for any cause for which the license of a resident could be suspended or revoked, and for a non-resident to continue to operate under such circumstances is declared a misdemeanor

As a part of the policy of reciprocity, paragraph (c) authorizes the Department to suspend or revoke the license

of a resident upon notice of conviction of a major offense in another state, and authorizes it upon conviction of a non-resident to forward a certified copy of the record to the Vehicle Commissioner of the state in which the person is resident Paragraph (d) of Section 19 requires the surrender of license and/or badges when a license is suspended or revoked and the return of these at the termination of the period of suspension It also limits the period of suspension to one year Forfeiture of license for a longer period must be through revocation.

The effect of a suspension is that at the end of the period of suspension the license is by law reinstated and the certificate shall be returned to the licensee. The effect of a revocation is a legal cancellation of the license. Reinstatement can be obtained only by new application and examination after a period of one year from date of the original revocation.

Right of Appeal to Courts

As a protection against arbitrary use of the Department's powers, Section 20 provides that any person denied a license or any person whose license has been revoked, except where such revocation was mandatory, may file a petition and obtain a hearing before the courts of record in the county in which the person resides, and the court may overrule the Department if it determines that the Department has abused its discretion This is only the usual and reasonable provision for court review of administrative action.

New License After Revocation

Section 21 prohibits issuance of a new license within one year from the date of a revocation, as licenses are to be revoked only for very serious offenses or convincing proof of inability to drive a motor vehicle safely.

Liability of Parent, Guardian or Employer

Carrying out further the belief that minors under eighteen shall not be permitted to drive unless an adult closely associated with such minor will assume responsibility for his acts, Section 22 makes jointly liable with the minor, in case of negligence of the minor when driving, the parent or other person who signed the minor's application for a license

Liability of Owner

Similarly, the owner of the motor vehicle causing or knowingly permitting a minor under eighteen to drive a vehicle is made in Section 23 jointly liable for damages caused by the negligence of the minor This provision is in harmony with the policy now effective in many states of imposing upon the owner responsibility for the operation of a motor vehicle by another with the express or implied permission of the owner In fact, New York, Michigan and Iowa have by statute broadened the liability of the owner to the extent that he is made responsible for the negligence of any other person operating the motor vehicle with the express or implied permission of the owner

Liability for Public Employees

The state and similar political units are made jointly liable in Section 24 for the negligence of their employees while operating motor vehicles Instances have been known of inability on the part of injured persons to recover damages for negligent injury inflicted by public employees by reason of the latter being impecunious It is felt desirable that governmental agencies assume responsibility in such Also, statutory responsibility on the part of govcases ernmental agencies will be conducive to stricter supervision of public officers and employees in operating motor vehicles in the course of their employment. There will be less likelihood of public officers and employees disregarding traffic rules and regulations. The section will operate as a protection to the public both in inducing appropriate supervision and obedience to regulations and in providing financial responsibility to compensate innocent victims

Violation of License Provisions

It is recognized that the effectiveness of the licensing system depends upon reasonable assurance that persons cannot in any considerable numbers operate motor vehicles within the state without possessing licenses properly issued, in full effect at the time and belonging to the persons issuing them Section 25, therefore, carefully enumerates five violations of the license provisions which are believed to cover the entire matter of improper use of a license, whether because the license itself is fictitious, expired or otherwise inadquate, or because the user is not entitled to it. It is further provided in Section 26 that making a false affidavit in obtaining or seeking a license shall be perjury.

Other Violations

Sections 27-30 are of obvious importance, declaring it unlawful to permit an unlicensed driver to drive a motor vehicle, to employ a nonlicensed chauffeur, to permit violations of the Act and to drive while the license is suspended or revoked.

Penalties

Section 31 is a standard provision, declaring it a misdemeanor to violate any provision of the Act unless such violation is a felony, and establishing maximum limits, fines and/or imprisonment. No minima are offered, and the maximum fine is bracketed to permit adaptation to the conditions in an individual state.

Driving while the license is suspended or revoked, however, is placed in Section 32 in a different category Under such conditions the offender is knowingly violating an express order from the Vehicle Commissioner. In recognition of the seriousness of this offense it is provided that the offender shall be imprisoned for not less than two days nor more than six months, and that there may be imposed in addition, a fine of not more than \$500

Effect of and Short Title of Act

The remaining Sections of the Act, Nos 33-37, are standard provisions which need no explanation.

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