



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham, Teamsters Announces New Bill Calling for Drivers on Trucks with Autonomous Operating Technology

PETE HARCKHAM January 5, 2024

| ISSUE: **SENATOR HARCKHAM. SD40, TRANSPORTATION, TECHNOLOGY, ORGANIZED LABOR, ROAD SAFETY; INFRASTRUCTURE; HIGHWAY SAFETY**



State Sen. Pete Harckham with Teamsters Local 456 President Louis A. Picani and other Teamsters officials at the press conference in Elmsford

Elmsford, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham and leaders from Teamsters Local 456 announced new legislation today that will require drivers to accompany trucks with autonomous operating technology traveling on roadways in New York. The announcement was made at a special press conference here at the headquarters of Teamsters Local 456.

Joining Harckham and Louis A. Picani, president and principal officer of Teamsters Local 456, for the announcement were a number of other Teamsters officials, as well as Rachel Estroff, chief-of-staff for State Sen. Shelley B. Mayer, a co-sponsor of the new autonomous operating bill ([S.7758](#)).

To see a video of the press conference, click [here](#).

“The integral role of the trucking industry in our lives means we have to be proactive and vigilant about public safety and job security when it comes to technological innovations like autonomous operating vehicles,” said Harckham. “My bill simply requires autonomous vehicles weighing 10,000 pounds or more to have a licensed driver behind the wheel. This common-sense measure will ensure greater protection for residents and property while providing job security for over 270,000 New Yorkers.”

Right now, the vehicle and traffic law of New York State have no requirements for the heaviest vehicles, such as semi-trucks, to have a human being in the cab capable of taking control of the vehicle in case of emergency.

While there may be economic benefits to “driverless trucks,” the concerns about so-called “robot rigs” are many. Passenger vehicles from a variety of manufacturers utilizing driver-assist or full self-driving systems have been involved in hundreds of traffic accidents, some fatal. The potential for injury and death grows exponentially in such instances when the vehicle has the enormously greater mass, inertia and force of a commercial semi-trailer truck compared to a passenger vehicle.

Added Harckham, “Most people will agree that until this new technology is entirely ‘road-tested’ and glitch-free, we need drivers behind the wheel of autonomous operating trucks here in New York.”

The trucking industry in New York is responsible for 270,000 jobs—one out of every 27 jobs in the state—and produces wages over \$16 billion annually, much of it spent right here in New York. In total, there are about 58,300 heavy and tractor-trailer drivers working now who are state residents.

“The truck industry is the backbone to middle-class social mobility, but unfortunately these good-paying jobs are under attack,” Harckham noted.

“Senator Harckham’s bill would not only protect the livelihood of people being impacted by vehicles without a human operator, but it would also protect every person traveling in and out of the State of New York, including pedestrians and tourists, as these unmanned trucks are lethal weapons,” said Picani.

Pointing to the prevalence of computer hacking and cyber-crimes, which target banks, hospitals, schools and government agencies, Picani noted that “autonomous operating trucks are no different.”

“Allowing vehicles to be driven without a human operator could allow for possible cyber-attacks, which pose an immediate threat to those who are sharing the roads with these vehicles,” said Picani. “When a human operator is present, these potentially harmful errors become easily preventable.”

Tom Gesualdi, president of Teamsters Local 282 and Teamsters Joint Council 16, representing 120,000 workers across 26 different Teamster locals, said, “We hope that this bill will pass through the Senate and Assembly and be signed by the Governor, as it will protect many people who depend on driving as a career to support not only their families, but the local economies.”

State Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, “I am pleased to co-sponsor this important legislation, which will safeguard lives and jobs as automated vehicles become more widespread. In the case of an emergency, automated vehicles, particularly trucks that weigh tens of thousands of pounds, pose a great threat to everyone on the road. It is critical that there is a licensed person behind the wheel of these large and heavy vehicles to ensure safety. This legislation will also protect job security for tens of thousands of hard-working New Yorkers. I thank Senator Pete Harckham for introducing this legislation and to the Teamsters for bringing this issue to our attention. I am eager for it to pass this year.”

RELATED LEGISLATION

2023-S7758

- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate
- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Requires human safety operators for certain autonomous vehicles

November 15, 2023

In Senate Committee Transportation

Sponsored by Pete Harckham

Do you support this bill?