

Plaskett Introduces Bill to Expand Commercial Driver's License Access in USVI and Puerto Rico

The OPEN CDL Act would allow the USVI and PR to issue commercial driver's licenses, creating new job opportunities, strengthening highway safety, expanding the transportation workforce, and ensuring equal access to federally recognized credentials.

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V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett has introduced H.R. 5656, a bipartisan bill designed to grant the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico eligibility to issue commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) — a move she says will strengthen highway safety, expand workforce development, and correct a long-standing inequity that has excluded residents of the territories from obtaining these nationally recognized credentials.

A CDL is a specialized credential required across the United States for individuals operating large or heavy vehicles, such as tractor-trailers, buses, and trucks carrying hazardous materials. CDLs are regulated by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) in coordination with state and territorial motor vehicle agencies to ensure that commercial drivers meet uniform national safety and operational standards.

“I am proud to introduce bipartisan legislation to expand access to commercial driver’s licenses (CDLs) for residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, which will strengthen highway safety and bolster our local economies,” Plaskett said in announcing the measure. “This measure rectifies an inequity that has denied U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico residents these nationally recognized licenses, which are available to all other Americans. I appreciate the partnership of my colleagues Congressman Chuck Edwards (R-NC) and Resident Commissioner Hernández (D-PR) on this critical legislation, and I commend organizations like the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance for championing CDL access for our communities.”

The legislation — titled the OPEN CDL Act — would allow both territories to issue commercial driver’s licenses in compliance with federal standards, ensuring that drivers from the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico can hold the same credentials as those from the mainland United States.

Co-sponsor Congressman Chuck Edwards of North Carolina emphasized that the bill represents an important step toward fairness and economic opportunity for all Americans, including those living in U.S. territories.

“Americans in every part of the United States, including the territories, deserve access to the tools needed to strengthen their workforce and grow economically,” Edwards said. “The introduction of the OPEN CDL Act is a critical step toward meeting this goal by allowing Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to issue commercial driver’s licenses to those who are there legally. This legislation marks an important milestone in expanding the economic mobility of all Americans while enhancing the safety of our roads.”

Resident Commissioner Pablo José Hernández echoed that sentiment, describing the bill as a matter of equity and opportunity for workers in Puerto Rico.

“This bill is about fairness and opportunity,” Hernández said. “By allowing Puerto Rico to issue commercial driver’s licenses and working with federal regulators to ensure compliance, we’re opening doors for our people to access good-paying jobs, strengthen our transportation workforce, and ensure safety standards are met. Puerto Ricans deserve the same opportunities as workers in every state, and this measure helps level the playing field.”

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA), a key national organization focused on improving highway safety, issued its full endorsement of the legislation, according to Plaskett’s office. Executive Director Collin Mooney said the measure aligns with the Alliance’s mission to prevent commercial motor vehicle crashes and fatalities by ensuring consistent federal safety standards across all jurisdictions.

“The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance supports H.R. 5656. As a transportation safety organization, the Alliance is committed to preventing commercial motor vehicle crashes, injuries and fatalities on our roadways,” Mooney said. “This inclusive bill will bolster that goal by enabling the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to enhance their existing commercial driver’s license programs, aligning them with U.S. federal regulations and allowing for the recognition of those licenses as equivalent to other U.S. licenses with a single and proper credential for all CDL holders from both territories.”

Barbara Jackson-McIntosh, Director of the U.S. Virgin Islands Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), praised Plaskett's efforts and underscored the economic and safety benefits the legislation would bring to the territory.

"Expanding CDL access to the Virgin Islands is a strategic investment in our economy and public safety," Jackson-McIntosh said. "It also ensures that our commercial drivers meet federal safety standards, which is essential for protecting passengers, freight, and everyone who shares our roads. I applaud Congresswoman Plaskett for her leadership in advancing this vital initiative."

She added that the Bureau of Motor Vehicles is fully prepared to implement the CDL program once the bill becomes law. "The Bureau of Motor Vehicles is prepared to implement this program, helping residents access new career opportunities while ensuring our commercial drivers meet federal safety standards," Jackson-McIntosh stated.

If enacted, H.R. 5656 would bring the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico in line with all U.S. states and other territories that already have authority to issue federally recognized CDLs. Supporters say the change would not only create career pathways for drivers and transportation workers but also enhance safety on highways by ensuring consistent, nationwide compliance with federal standards.

Delegate Plaskett said the legislation represents a unified effort to promote fairness, economic opportunity, and public safety across all parts of the United States — including its territories.