

Delaware SB 258

OPPOSITION TESTIMONY

June 29, 2024

House Republican Caucus

NetChoice respectfully asks that you **oppose** SB 258 as it would effectively ban autonomous truck deployments in Delaware by requiring a human safety operator to be physically present in all heavy-duty autonomous vehicles (AVs).

SB 258 represents a misguided and harmful attempt to stifle innovation, impede economic progress, and deny Delawareans the numerous benefits of autonomous vehicle technology. We urge you to reject this bill for the following reasons.

SB 258's significant flaws:

1. Undermining Safety and Innovation;
2. Creating Economic Harm and Loss of Competitive Edge;
3. Ignoring Consumer Benefits of AVs;
4. Hampering Efforts to Improve Environmental Matters;
5. Fails to Address Labor Issues in an Appropriate Manner; and
6. Sets a Dangerous Precedent for Delaware.

NetChoice is a trade association of leading internet businesses that promotes the value, convenience, and choice that internet business models provide to American consumers. Our mission is to make the internet safe for free enterprise and free expression.

1. Undermining Safety and Innovation

Autonomous vehicles have demonstrated a remarkable safety record over millions of miles driven. Unlike human drivers, AVs do not drive impaired, text while driving, fall asleep at the wheel, or speed recklessly.

By removing human error from the equation, AVs have the potential to significantly reduce the over 40,000 annual traffic fatalities in the United States. SB 258 would deprive Delaware of these crucial safety benefits.

2. Economic Harm and Loss of Competitive Edge

If enacted, SB 258 would make Delaware a national outlier and the only state to effectively ban autonomous trucks. This would discourage investment in Delaware's economy and force the state to fall behind in the rapidly advancing field of autonomous technology. The bill would deny Delaware the economic benefits of AV deployment, including increased supply chain efficiency, reduced transportation costs, and the creation of new high-quality jobs in the AV industry.

3. Ignoring Consumer Benefits

The deployment of autonomous trucks has the potential to reduce transportation costs, which could lead to lower prices for consumers on a wide range of goods. SB 258 would deny Delawareans these potential cost savings and the improved efficiency in the delivery of goods and services.

4. Addressing Labor Concerns Responsibly

While we recognize the importance of addressing potential impacts on the workforce, banning autonomous trucks is not the solution. The trucking industry is currently facing a severe driver shortage, estimated to reach 160,000 by 2031. Autonomous trucks can help alleviate this shortage while creating new job opportunities in areas such as remote vehicle monitoring, maintenance, and logistics support. Instead of an outright ban, Delaware should focus on workforce development and transition programs to prepare for the future of transportation.

5. Hampering Environmental Progress

Autonomous trucks offer significant environmental benefits, including improved fuel efficiency, reduced congestion, and lower emissions. By impeding the deployment of this technology, SB 258 would deny Delaware these important environmental advantages.

6. Setting a Dangerous Precedent

SB 258 sets a troubling precedent of using heavy-handed regulation to protect incumbent industries at the expense of technological progress. This approach threatens to spread to other states and even the federal level, potentially crippling the United States' ability to compete globally in autonomous vehicle technology.

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Rather than hastily enacting SB 258, we strongly encourage the General Assembly to work with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive framework for AV operations that balances innovation, safety, and economic growth. Delaware has the opportunity to position itself as a leader in embracing new technologies that can improve the lives of its citizens.

Again, we respectfully **ask you to oppose SB 258**. As always we offer ourselves as a resource to discuss any of these issues with you in further detail, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide the committee with our thoughts on this important matter.¹

Sincerely,

Carl Szabo
Vice President & General Counsel, NetChoice

NetChoice is a trade association that works to protect free expression and promote free enterprise online.

¹ The views of NetChoice expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of NetChoice members.