



Statement of

**Jerome Redmond
President and CEO
American Truck Training
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

Before the

Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on:

Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and Workers

October 25, 2023

Introduction:

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of American Truck Training.

At American Truck Training, we provide professional truck driver training that changes the lives of hundreds of people each year. Our training provides students with the skillset needed to operate commercial motor vehicles safely on our roads and offers a direct path to good paying jobs with leading motor carriers.

Our strong relationships with prominent trucking companies means that our students are typically pre-hired before they even graduate from the training program. Many of our students go on to work for leading national carriers.

At my core, I wanted to lead a company like American Truck Training so that I could help people find rewarding careers that allowed them to provide for their families.

The inspiration for this comes from my father, Hubert Johnson, who worked tirelessly to get his Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and start a career that provided for our family when I was growing up.

My biological father passed away when I was very young. Hubert Johnson, who we called "Pops", married my mother and took on the responsibility of raising my siblings and I. For as long as I can remember, he's always worked to make a better life for his children.

Before my father got his CDL, he worked as a janitor and a gas station attendant in Chicago. While he always worked hard, those jobs weren't always enough to provide for our family.

My father viewed getting a CDL as a ticket to a better job. I can remember him telling my mother, "Hattie, if I can just get my CDL."

Getting his CDL was always going to be a challenge as he'd only finished his education through the 8th grade.

But a job opportunity came up with the city of Tulsa in Oklahoma and an opportunity to use a city truck to train for his CDL.

I can remember my parents sitting at the kitchen table late in the evening with my mother reading my father questions for the written CDL exam.

That image is burned in my brain. It's the first time that I got to see someone in my life go after what seemed like an impossible dream.

Allowing 529 Plans to Pay for Career Training and Credentialing Expenses is Common Sense:

One of the most challenging things I encounter is having to tell a promising truck driving student that I cannot find a way to help them pay for school. For many students, this training is the one thing they need to be eligible for a good job that will help them provide for their families.

It is heartbreaking when we can't take that final step because someone does not have the ability to pay for training.

My team at American Truck Training and I work relentlessly to help people in need find ways to pay for this lifechanging training. One noteworthy story really highlights this dedication.

Recently, a truck driving school in Oklahoma City abruptly closed its doors. Many students at this school had already made down payments on their training, amounting to as much as \$2,500. Those students were left without answers as to whether they'd ever complete their training and saw no path to getting their money back.

They also had no idea if they'd still be able to get the truck driving jobs they so desperately wanted.

While \$2,500 may not sound like a lot to you, losing that amount of money can be devastating for people who are struggling to make rent or pay their bills.

I've been in that situation where I've had to come home to my family to say that I'd lost an opportunity. I know what that feels like. I could not allow myself or my school to operate in good conscience without finding a solution for the students from this other school.

We extended a helping hand to these students who were our neighbors in the Oklahoma City community, some of whom were in tears over their predicament. We found a way to provide tuition credits to students who had paid into their schooling. And most importantly: we helped them complete their training to ensure they'd still have the opportunity to get hired. **All of the students who came to American Truck Training from the closed school completed our program.**¹

This story is just one example of the effort my team makes on a daily basis to provide any help we can to our students. However, it is impossible for us to help everyone who faces challenges paying for training.

¹ I was grateful to be interviewed by KFOR4 in Oklahoma City about what American Truck Training was doing to help these students. That interview is available here: Ashley Moss, "More options for students after truck driving school closes," KFOR4, November 29, 2022, <https://kfor.com/news/more-options-for-students-after-truck-driving-school-closes/>. American Truck Training's tuition offer was posted to our website here: <https://americalovestrucking.com/att-is-here-to-help-cdl-university-students-welcome/>

Some people still cannot secure a funding option, and the cost of that is their future job opportunities in the trucking industry. And when they miss out on a trucking career, it is a real loss. To give you an idea of the return on investment available in the trucking industry, here is some information about outcomes for ATT graduates.

Truck driver training typically costs between \$4,000 and \$7,000 and can be delivered in about 4-6 weeks. Once a student earns their CDL and graduates, the student is hired, and that new driver continues their training as a paid employee.

ATT graduates that drive over-the-road or regionally with a preferred carrier will earn an average of \$60,000 to \$100,000 *in their first year* with access to full health benefits, retirement options, and paid vacations and holidays. Some drivers will also have access to sign on bonuses, tuition reimbursement, and other benefits.

I'll reiterate, this is a career where tuition of four to seven thousand dollars and training over four to six weeks connects you to a career with annual salaries of \$60,000-\$100,000 *in your first year*.

That's why I support H.R. 1477, the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act. This proposal would allow for 529 Plans to pay for career training and credentialing expenses, including truck driver training.

This solution is simply common sense. It would allow college savings plans to become *career savings plans*.

For families who sponsor a 529 Plan for their children, grandchildren, or other relatives, this change would give them additional ways to use the funds they were able to set aside to get the education they need for a rewarding career.

While a 2- or 4-year college or university may be the right path for some young adults, others may want a more direct pathway into a good paying job. Or for a student who did not find their preferred career path after attending a college or university, leftover funds applied to career training may offer a second chance at securing that education and credential that could jumpstart their careers.

We've had students in that situation attend our training program at American Truck Training.

A gentleman named Gerald graduated from ATT in 2018. Prior to coming to ATT, he graduated college and had worked in sales for many years. Since he graduated from our program, he's remained in the trucking industry, working for a company called XPO Logistics. At XPO, he's doubled his salary from what he was making in sales prior to getting trained at our program.

Another student who is seeking a new career opportunity with truck driver training is a woman named Alania. She enrolled in nursing school but didn't complete her program due to the length

of the program and responsibilities of life getting in the way. Alania is currently enrolled in our program. She's been pre-hired and has a strong likelihood to make more as a driver than she would have as a nurse.

The solution provided by this proposal can also provide a lifeline for struggling families. For those who face challenges in making their rent or paying their bills, the prospect of saving for a full college experience for their children could be daunting. Even with the best intentions, these families may only be able to set aside a small sum for their children's education.

For these families, the small amount they can save can still put their children on the path to a successful career. Professional truck driver training can be much cheaper and completed over a shorter time period compared to a 2- or 4-year college or university.

Drivers Entering the Industry Today Will Receive Minimum Standard Training at Any Provider:

American Truck Training is a member of the Commercial Vehicle Training Association. CVTA is the nation's largest association of professional truck driver training providers. CVTA membership includes nearly 100 member schools with nearly 400 locations across 46 states. CVTA schools are the largest source of entry-level truck drivers in the nation, training approximately 100,000 students per year. CVTA's membership also includes prominent, reputable motor carriers interested in supporting the training industry to ensure that they will employ safe drivers who operate on our nation's highways.

Through my work at American Truck Training, I became involved with CVTA, and I am proud to currently serve as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for CVTA.

People using their 529 Plan savings to pay for truck driver training can be confident that their money will be well spent, whether they receive training at a CVTA school, National Association of Publicly Funded Truck Driving Schools (NAPFTDS) school, receive in-house training from a motor carrier, or train with another training provider.

That is because the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), within the U.S. Department of Transportation, is enforcing minimum, industry-wide standards governing the delivery of truck driver training.

I've been proud to lead CVTA's work as the Association has supported the implementation of these industry-wide standards for the training of new commercial motor vehicle operators, called 'Entry-Level Driver Training' (ELDT).

CVTA joined 25 other stakeholder organizations to participate in an advisory committee, hosted by FMCSA, that led to industry-wide recommendations on minimum standards for entry-level drivers. Stakeholders from across the industry, including large motor carriers, small motor carriers, owners and independent operators, insurance companies, law enforcement, and training providers were all represented on this committee.

Proper implementation of these standards ensures that students will receive the minimum standard of truck driver training, no matter which kind of training provider they select. This means they will get the training they need to ensure they are hireable by reputable motor carriers and can operate commercial motor vehicles safely on our nation's roadways.

As a result, FMCSA estimates that over the first ten years of implementation, these standards will result in 115 lives saved, 2,364 injuries avoided, and 7,857 property damage only crashes prevented.²

Conclusion:

I'd like to conclude with one final story of a student whose success has really stuck with me. A woman named Yolanda came to American Truck Training on a Saturday over a decade ago. She told me that she wanted to get her CDL, but at the time she did not even have a regular driver's license.

She'd experienced a lot of financial challenges, so she didn't have the funds to pay for our program and financing her training was not an option.

I walked her step-by-step through how she could start training at our program, first by getting her regular driver's license.

It's a method I've used many times over: Give clear steps to students and ask them to report back after each step; and always affirm for students that you are fully committed to helping them succeed.

Yolanda got her driver's license and got approved to receive funding for truck driver training through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. She had everything she needed to start our program.

At first, Yolanda struggled with some of the maneuvers in the truck. But she was one of the most determined students I'd ever had in my program, and her persistence and positive attitude made me confident she could be trained to be a safe driver.

If I can tell that your heart is in the right place and that you will be a safe driver, I'm never going to give up on you.

We gave her a little longer in our program than a typical student gets. But that extra training time paid off.

She passed her CDL exam and called us afterwards to let us know she'd stop by the school.

² Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration presentation, November 3, 2022, CVTA Fall Conference

I got our entire staff to stand out in front of the school to congratulate her when she arrived.

When Yolanda arrived and saw the team that had believed in her and stuck with her throughout her training, she broke down in tears. We all ran down the steps to give her a hug and show how proud of her we were.

Yolanda has been a professional driver now for ten years. And she's maintained that bright, positive attitude throughout her time in the industry.

It's people like Yolanda that I think of when I think of why Congress should pass H.R. 1477, the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act.

People like Yolanda don't need for government to take care of them. What they need is an opportunity: a little extra assistance and people in their community who believe in them, lift them up, and help them succeed.

In my work, we do that through training people for successful truck driving careers. Other industries provide similar training that prepares people to succeed in other fields.

In fact, I know that over 600 other organizations from every state in the country support this legislation through an organization known as the Tomorrow's Workforce Coalition. This coalition represents sectors of our economy with numerous career opportunities, including many that, like trucking, do not require a college degree. Through my work with CVTA, I'm proud that we've joined this coalition.

I humbly ask members of this Committee to support this proposal, and to dedicate yourselves every day that you represent our nation here in Washington D.C. to doing things that will help people succeed.

I'll be back home in Oklahoma City working relentlessly to help people like Yolanda make better lives for themselves and their families, and to support our economy along the way.

I hope you'll join me in that effort.

I'm deeply honored you've taken the time to hear from me in today's testimony. Thank you for the opportunity.