

- SUBJECT:** Substituting online driver education courses for classroom instruction
- COMMITTEE:** Public Safety — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Merritt, Frost, Burnam, Driver, P. King, Lewis, Mallory Caraway, Rodriguez, Vo
0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — Carlos Reyna, I Drive Safely; (*Registered, but did not testify*: David Anderson, U.S. Interactive)
Against — None
On — Rhonda Fleming, Texas Department of Public Safety; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Margaret Spinks, Department of Public Safety)
- BACKGROUND:** A student has several ways to fulfill the requirement that each applicant for a driver's license under the age of 18 take a comprehensive driver education course. An applicant may choose a course offered through a school district, open-enrollment charter school, or institution of higher education; a parent-taught course; or, a licensed driver training school. A driver's education course must include 32 hours of classroom instruction and 14 hours of behind-the-wheel training.
Courses offered through a school district or a parent-taught course may use on-line instruction instead of classroom instruction. A driver training school may not use on-line instruction. On-line instruction curricula for school district courses must be approved by the Texas Education Agency, and the Department of Public Safety approves the on-line curricula of parent-taught courses.
- DIGEST:** HB 2399 would allow a driver education school to teach all or part of the classroom portion of an approved driver education course by on-line instruction if the commissioner of education to approved the course. The commissioner could approve on-line instruction courses only if the testing and security measures were at least as secure as those of the usual classroom setting and the course satisfied any other applicable requirement associated with the classroom setting.

The commissioner could set an application fee to be paid by driver training schools to cover the administrative costs of reviewing the application.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2009.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 858 by Seliger, passed the Senate by 29-1 (Zaffirini) on April 24 and was reported favorably, without amendment, by the House Public Safety Committee on May 5.