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Commercial Driver License Dockets: A Practical Path to Safer Roads and More Accurate CDL Adjudication

By Dennis Wygmans, Senior Attorney, NTLC, NDAAL

Cases involving Commercial Driver License (CDL)¹ holders are atypical. A speeding citation, impaired driving offense, crash-related charge, or felony involving a commercial driver's license holder can carry consequences that extend far beyond a fine or local disposition. It can affect public safety, interstate commerce, a driver's livelihood, federal compliance, and the integrity of state and federal licensing records. For that reason, prosecutors and courts that handle commercial driver's license and commercial motor vehicle matters need specialized

¹ Throughout this article, the author uses the term "CDL holder," which is intended to include those who are Commercial License Permit (CLP) holders as well.

procedures, trained personnel, and reliable reporting practices to ensure that they all comply with federal and state statutes and regulations governing commercial driver licensing. To address these needs, some localities have created specialized CDL dockets wherein the prosecutors, judges, and court personnel are fully informed of the nature of these cases and their unique statutory and reporting requirements.

Cases Involving Commercial Driver Licenses Create Unique Challenges

Commercial operators are held to higher standards than typical motor vehicle operators. To become a commercial motor vehicle operator a person must pass rigorous knowledge and skills tests, and—depending on whether they want to operate a special class of commercial motor vehicle—must also pass a subject matter specific examination.² As a part of these examinations they are not only made aware of the requirements expected of them as CDL holders, but also of the consequences of their failure to uphold the standards to which they are held.³ CDL applicants are also subject to extensive driving background checks, medical examination and certification, and drug testing prior to licensure.⁴

Once licensed, CDL holders are subject to ongoing drug testing, medical examination and certification, and driving and conviction record disclosures.⁵ As such, CDL holders are aware of the increased risks commercial motor vehicles pose to their own safety and the safety of others on our nation's highways, as well as the higher standards that they are held to in order to keep everyone on or near our public highways safe. They are also aware that certain behaviors and medical conditions may lead to their disqualification as CDL operators.⁶

Just as CDL holders are held to a higher standard, states are also held to a higher standard in issuing CDLs and in holding CDL holders accountable for their prohibited behaviors than with other licensed drivers. States are responsible for maintaining licensing status for CDL holders.⁷ This includes accurately and appropriately adjudicating and reporting certain offenses committed by CDL holders.^{8, 9}

Prosecutors retain great discretion in determining what cases to charge and how to resolve them once they are charged. When faced with prosecuting ticket offenses, prosecutors are often reluctant to proceed except in the most egregious cases or with repeat offenders. Their sympathies for a CDL holder facing a ticket may also inform a decision not to prosecute, also known as *nolle prosequi*, or to amend a ticket, especially because they are concerned about the impact the ticket will have on a CDL holder's livelihood. These are not just another ticket case, however, as bad driving behavior coupled with operating massive trucks can result in disproportionate harm to others. Moreover, bad driving behaviors are positively linked to future crash risks.

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² 49 C.F.R. §§ 380 and 383

³ 49 C.F.R. § 383.111

⁴ 49 C.F.R. §§ 40, 382, 383, and 391

⁵ 49 C.F.R. §§ 382 and 383

⁶ 49 C.F.R. § 383

⁷ 49 C.F.R. § 384

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Earlywine, Elizabeth, "Mastering Masking: Why and How to Avoid Masking CDL-Holder Convictions," *Between the Lines*, July 1, 2019, accessed at www.ndaa.org/news/july-2019-mastering-masking-why-and-how-to-avoid-masking. More information about masking can be found at www.ndaa.org/commercial-drivers-license.

The American Transportation Research Institute found that in 2022 CDL holders convicted of certain traffic violations had high likelihoods of being involved in a future crash.¹⁰ For example, a failure to yield conviction carried with it an increased risk of crash involvement of 141%.^{11, 12} Consider also that according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, in 2024 fatal two-vehicle crashes between a large truck and a passenger vehicle, 96% of the fatalities were occupants of the passenger vehicle.¹³ A review of all fatalities in crashes involving commercial motor vehicles finds that in that same year only 17% of those killed were occupants of the commercial motor vehicle.¹⁴

The research linking certain traffic violations to increased future crash risk, together with the unique safety considerations associated with commercial motor vehicles, provides important context for the heightened standards and reporting requirements applicable to CDL holders. Though prosecutors retain broad discretion in charging decisions and case resolution, cases involving CDL holders are subject to a regulatory framework that limits the extent to which traffic offenses can be resolved in ways that would obscure or negate the required licensing consequences. One approach developed to address these requirements is the creation of CDL-specific dockets, which are designed to facilitate efficient case processing while promoting compliance with federal reporting and anti-masking regulations.

Connecticut's Solution: A CDL Specific Court Docket

Generally, courts and prosecutors are free to mete out punishment or to resolve cases in a manner that upholds individualized discretion. As set forth above, such freedom is not permissible under the CDL regulatory scheme. Thus, to ensure that states abide by regulations some localities have found that it is advantageous to establish CDL holder courts. These courts are often convened online to accommodate the itinerant nature of the vocation and to ensure that specially trained judges, prosecutors, and clerks can easily attend. CDL courts rapidly and easily resolve cases, ensure that convictions are reported quickly and accurately to the State Driver License Authority (SDLA), and attempt to safeguard against masking.

In search of a more efficient means of processing and adjudicating traffic infraction (fine only) cases, following the COVID pandemic, the Connecticut Judicial Branch committed to transitioning these cases from the courtroom to entirely online.¹⁵ Traffic tickets made up a large number of those cases. For example, according to Stacey Manware, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Judicial Branch, in 2015, 365,832 motor vehicle infractions were heard in open court. That number waned over the next five years, took a steep dip during COVID, but started to rise again, with 176,798 cases heard in 2025. Of those, four percent involved CDL holders. Thanks to a grant from the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration (FMCSA), the automated system was first developed to address infractions committed by CDL holders. In the final quarter of 2025, the cases with CDL holder defendants were processed electronically and hearings were held entirely online, regardless of whether they were operating a commercial motor vehicle or any other vehicle.

CDL courts rapidly and easily resolve cases, ensure that convictions are reported quickly and accurately to the State Driver License Authority (SDLA), and attempt to safeguard against masking.

¹⁰ American Transportation Research Institute, *Predicting Truck Crash Involvement: 2022 Update*, accessed at www.regulations.gov/document/FMCSA-2025-0622-9362, accessed on July 31, 2026.

¹¹ To put that into perspective, a 75% increased risk means that such a person was three times as likely to be in a future crash than a driver that had no such conviction.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Comparison of large truck and passenger vehicle crashes, accessed at www.iihs.org/research-areas/fatality-statistics/detail/large-trucks, accessed on October 15, 2026.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) assisted in the effort and the workgroup presented on the online court on February 19, 2026. A video recording of that presentation can be accessed at vimeo.com/showcase/11715086?video=1166659647. Much of the information in this article comes from that video.

Most traffic tickets in Connecticut are issued electronically. When a ticket is issued, defendants are provided with an answer date and login information to plead guilty and pay a fine, or to plead not guilty and initiate a case. If an accused does not follow through electronically and attempts to enter a plea through the mail, then they are directed to the online portal. The ticket is also sent to the Centralized Infractions Bureau (CIB), where the case is initiated.

Once a case is initiated, Connecticut CDL holders are identified by their photo and their Personal Identification Number (PID) and automatically flagged throughout the entire process. If the operator is not a Connecticut CDL holder, but has a CDL, then the CIB identifies their status only when an issuing law enforcement officer notes that the accused has a CDL on the ticket. A defendant may plead guilty and pay the fine through the online system without having to go to court and over half simply pay their fine and move on.

Prosecutors are informed of the initiation of the case when a defendant pleads not guilty and must make an offer or enter nolle prosequi at that time and within the online system. The system flags offers that would constitute masking and inquires if they still want to proceed. Defendants are informed of the offer and may accept or decline through the online portal.

If a defendant pleads not guilty and rejects the offer, then the court schedules a hearing on the matter, typically four weeks from the date of the rejection. Hearings are scheduled based upon prosecutor availability provided ahead of time by the state's attorney's offices. Defense counsel may enter their appearance through the court portal in the same manner as in any case. There are two online courts. Each magistrate hears three to six cases an hour, and the virtual court operates from 9 am to 5 pm. Once the case is scheduled, a notice is sent to the parties electronically. Defendants may thereafter plead guilty at any time prior to the hearing by entering a plea online without a magistrate present.

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The online portal is robust. On it a party may find scheduling information, relevant information about the defendant and the offense charged, the issuing officer to allow for subpoena service, as well as contact information for defense counsel. Documents and videos are provided to the court clerk prior to the hearing, are then uploaded to the portal, and may be accessed by either party online. Continuances may also be requested and granted through the portal.

Three days prior to a hearing, the court sends a checklist and guide to defendants via the portal and email. The guide informs a defendant on the operation of the court; the software needed to appear by video in the court, to log on early, and how to send links to witnesses. A court clerk logs on fifteen minutes before the hearing to walk defendants through the process of accessing and presenting evidence and to ensure that there are no technical issues. If a defendant fails to appear, then that is recorded by the magistrate and reported to the SDLA, the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The hearings are livestreamed on YouTube.¹⁶

With the assistance of NCSC, the court has developed training materials and video for the prosecution.¹⁷ While the video includes a primer on the concept of CDL masking watching it is entirely elective. The video has been distributed to all thirteen State's Attorney's Offices via their executive office and is provided to each new prosecutor who joins the system.

¹⁶ Accessed at www.youtube.com/channel/UCLpzIpUFy84k9KorsnDEFw, accessed on July 23, 2026.

¹⁷ Accessed at mediaservices.jud.ct.gov/cib/WIP/CIB_CDL_Original.mp4.

Have the Commercial Driver License Holder-Specific Courts Been Successful?

Before Connecticut implemented their online CDL court system, 66% of the cases involving CDL holders were nolle prosequi. That number fell to 6% in the first quarter for the online courts. It is believed that there was such a large reduction in nolle prosequi because prosecutors are not free to nolle prosequi in a case at the review stage without providing a reason for doing so that is consistent with anti-masking regulations.

Since implementing the online process, adjudication of guilt has risen from 34% to 56%. Nevertheless, 43% of these cases do not resolve pretrial, leading to hearings being scheduled. According to Justin Blain, Assistant State's Attorney (ASA) New Britain Judicial District, one of the reasons so many cases may move forward to Superior Court or for an online CDL hearing is because CDL holders realize the consequences of pleading guilty and request trials in hopes that a case may be dismissed or in hopes that they will prevail. Ms. Manware points out, however, that because prosecutors are free to amend a charge in the initial process, often the tickets are up-charged to meet the true nature of the CDL holder's operation. This may also account for the number of cases that go to hearing, because the CDL holders are surprised by the new charge.

Between September 2025 and May 2026, of the cases that proceeded to an online hearing, 23% resulted in nolle prosequi and 15% of the defendants failed to appear. Three percent of the cases ended in dismissal, and 2% were transferred to Superior Court. Fifteen percent settled, twenty percent were continued, and one percent were found not guilty. Twenty-one percent resulted in a guilty verdict.

ASA Blain believes that the high number of nolle prosequi are because some prosecutors are willing to engage in masking because they are "just a ticket" and their attention is needed elsewhere on more serious offenses.

ASA Blain also believes that the convenience of online court is both an advantage and a challenge, a sentiment echoed by others involved in the process. However, although it is convenient, especially for law enforcement and defendants who no longer need to appear in court, many prosecutors have been slow to adopt the automated process because it is easier for them to just show up to court and address all the ticketed people at the same time. Others have proven reluctant to adopt a new platform.

In the NCSC presentation referenced in footnote 9, ASA Blain stated that the easy access online courts provide is fairer to defendants because historically they may have pleaded guilty to avoid the inconvenience of going to court and it places them on par with the prosecutor and police witnesses. However, he says that convenience presents challenges because defendants and officers are at times ill-prepared to appear, are distracted during the hearings, or fail to appear altogether.

Magistrate Michael Weber of the Connecticut Judicial Branch hears these cases online and shares some of ASA Blain's opinions. He finds online hearings to be fairer because defendants who may have been intimidated by appearing in a physical court are more at ease online. He pointed out that online courts free up physical court space for more serious matters to be heard and allow magistrates from around the state to preside over hearings throughout the state without having to travel, which increases the overall number of cases that can be heard by any single magistrate. He does acknowledge, however, that these hearings do present challenges because not everyone is technically savvy, and many defendants have difficulty presenting exhibits and remaining on screen throughout the hearing. He believes both problems will dissipate with time as younger defendants are more adept at navigating online forums and through improved training on courtroom decorum provided by the court clerks.

It does appear that this new process is successful because by eliminating barriers it improves access justice, it assists prosecutors in processing these cases in a manner consistent with anti-masking statutes and regulations and has increased the number of successful prosecutions.

From an onlooker's perspective it does appear that this new process is successful because by eliminating barriers it improves access justice, it assists prosecutors in processing these cases in a manner consistent with anti-masking statutes and regulations and has increased the number of successful prosecutions.¹⁸

CDL Dockets Are Efficient, Effective, and Evolving

Implementing a CDL docket for infractions in Connecticut was not a small undertaking. However, it has streamlined a formerly mostly paper process, saving many associated work hours while increasing revenue for traffic violations. It also allows hearing officers, magistrates, and judges to handle more than one docket from a single location, decreasing travel time and expense. The CDL docket also makes clear to all of those involved that ticketed individuals are all CDL holders, ensuring that there is no confusion between them and other licensed operators.

As a part of the process, prosecutors have been—and continue to be—educated about anti-masking regulations and the dangers of allowing a CDL holder to escape the consequences of disqualification. While there are still CDL holders who fail to appear for their hearings, attending them no longer requires travel to the various courts in Connecticut, and any associated anxiety of appearing in court is diminished through the opportunity to appear online in a familiar setting. The online court also allows law enforcement to attend the hearings with little interruption to their everyday duties.

The process is not yet complete, however, while the court continues to collect data and feedback on outcomes and operation. The training of defendants and prosecutors in adoption and use of the system remains an ongoing project, for example. Nevertheless, the cost saving, convenience, and circumscribed nature of the system recommend the development and adoption of a similar system in your jurisdiction.

About the Author

Dennis Wygmans came to the law after working nearly twenty years as a music industry professional. He attended Seton Hall University School of Law beginning in the fall of 2000 with a focus in Intellectual Property. After graduation and passing the New Jersey and New York bar exams in 2004, he practiced some entertainment law but most of his practice was in employment, corporate litigation, and consumer finance. In 2009, he moved back to his home state of Vermont where for the next three years he mostly attended to the needs of his baby daughter, while maintaining a small entertainment practice.



There isn't much corporate or entertainment legal work in southern Vermont, so Dennis found himself learning courtroom practice under the tutelage of recently retired Windham County State's Attorney, Dan Davis, after passing the Vermont bar in 2011. It was there that he fell in love with criminal practice opening his own office advising criminal defendants and small business owners. The following year he entered into a contract with the Vermont Public Defender's Office representing defendants in Addison and Windham Counties. Within a year he was working in the Addison County State's Attorney's Office as a Deputy State's Attorney prosecuting sex and domestic assault crimes.

After almost four years as a Deputy State's Attorney, in January 2017, Dennis was appointed by Governor Shumlin to succeed David Fenster as the Addison County State's Attorney when Fenster was appointed to the bench. Dennis resigned that position nearly six years later to become one of Vermont's two Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors, a position he held for four years where he published the State's first Driving Under the Influence manual and created numerous impaired driving trainings for both law enforcement and prosecutors.

¹⁸ It should be noted that Phoenix, AZ municipal court also has a specific CDL court.

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