

Health Ministry Wants to Restrict Short People's Right to Drive

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Russians of shorter height will soon lose their right to drive trucks, buses and trams.

Russians of shorter height will soon lose their right to drive trucks, buses and trams, according to a draft Health Ministry order that critics have denounced as discriminatory against many skilled operators and particularly against women, a news report said Friday.

The order lists a height of less than 150 centimeters as medical grounds for denying a special driver license, such as those required to operate cars with trailers, heavy pickup and other trucks, buses, trams and trolleybuses, Izvestia reported, citing a copy of the order.

A retired Interior Ministry colonel and lawyer Yevgeny Chernousov said the order was not corroborated by any evidence to show that people of a shorter stature may be somehow less capable of driving, Izvestia reported.

"There are no statistics demonstrating that people shorter than 1.5 meters drive badly or are

responsible for more accidents," Chernousov was quoted as saying.

He said that the draft order appears to be directed primarily at women, whose presence in the driver's seat of trolleybuses infuriates some Russian men, Izvestia reported.

Viktor Travin, a law firm president, called the draft order "discrimination," pointing out that many modern vehicles are equipped with adjustable seats that allow even extremely short-statured people to drive, the report said.

While a severe disability that may compromise road safety may be grounds for denying a driver license, "if a person is completely healthy, what does height have to do with this?" he was quoted as saying.

"There is no problem with people of short stature driving big cars or trams and trolleybuses," he told Izvestia, adding that European nations have no height restrictions on commercial driver licenses.

Chernousov, the retired police colonel, also ridiculed the prospect of enforcing the new rules, Izvestia reported.

"It's unclear how traffic police officers will spot violators," he was quoted as saying. "What are they going to do — walk around with tape measures or something?"

Pyotr Shkumatov, head of the Blue Bucket society — a public movement against government officials' reckless driving and use of blue flashing lights on their cars — also said that the rule would be difficult to enforce and many drivers would be able to bypass it, the report said.

"There is no point in introducing [these] restrictions on driver licenses: Any medical certificate can be bought at a private clinic," he was quoted as saying. "Traffic police have no access to medical records."

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