

The Hartford Courant.



THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY
PUBLISHED NEWSPAPER IN AMERICA

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EDITORIALS

A Law That Trial Lawyers Love

Companies that lease or rent cars have a valid point in arguing that Connecticut unfairly holds them liable when customers are involved in accidents.

Only Connecticut, Rhode Island and New York have unlimited vicarious liability, which allows accident victims to sue leasing and rental companies for damages.

Leasing firms, in particular, are withdrawing from the state in response to lawsuits seeking hundreds of millions of dollars. Chase Manhattan Automotive Finance Corp. has threatened to pull out of Connecticut July 1 if the law is not changed.

A bill that sailed through the legislature's Judiciary Committee provides only a half solution. It would exempt companies from liability only when leases are for one year or longer. Car rental companies would get no relief.

The same principle should apply to both kinds of businesses. Neither should be held financially responsible for the actions of negli-

gent drivers who rent or lease vehicles.

At least one leasing company already has withdrawn from Connecticut because of the liability law. Others are hiking their fees.

Those who oppose change make a good point when they say that drivers sometimes do not carry enough insurance to compensate the victims of serious accidents. The bill addresses that shortcoming by requiring that anyone who leases a car would have to carry insurance of \$250,000 per person and \$500,000 per occurrence.

Trial lawyers oppose reform because they want to be able to sue the parties with the deepest pockets. That's hardly a good reason to block reform.

Before the House and Senate vote on the proposed overhaul, the bill should be amended to treat rental and leasing companies the same. Then Connecticut should join the rest of the nation in discarding the dubious concept of vicarious liability.