

TO: General Assembly Education Committee

RE: Raised House Bill No. 6955, AN ACT CONCERNING OPERATOR'S LICENSES BEARING A SCHOOL ENDORSEMENT

DATE: February 13, 2007

Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Athena Kurtzenacker, and I work as a public school bus driver for Laidlaw Transit Inc., the company which is contracted with the Shelton (Fairfield County) public school district. My co-workers and I are responsible for the safe, reliable transportation for our communities' school children each and every day, and we take pride in the work we do. After all, we are often both the first and last school staff our students see on a daily basis.

I appreciate the Committee raising the issue of school bus safety with House Bill 6955. In fact, as a member of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, many of the solutions I understand the proposed bill would make law are part of the collective bargaining agreements my fellow members and I have negotiated with our employers.

I hope your Committee will use this opportunity to do more to drive up standards in the school bus industry. I believe the real solution to protect the safety of more of our states school children is to increase retention and reduce turn-over among school bus drivers.

I believe school bus drivers, aides, and monitors working for private companies are not adequately compensated for the enormous responsibility we undertake every day. After all, for the safety of thousands of children we take to and from school is on our hands. You have the power to force these companies to put students before profits.

In my own personal situation, I transport children of all ages, from kindergarten through high school. These children and their parents depend on us -- and trust us -- to take care of them as if they were our own. I feel if you are involved in anyway with the transportation of children on a school bus you accept that enormous responsibility.

I urge you to pass legislation that would require the private school bus contractors hired by local districts to raise and meet income standards that provide us the means to live and raise our own families in the communities we work in. I urge you to require these employers to offer affordable health care for their employees, as well. Finally, requiring employers to honor our rights to organize will make sure we have a voice on the job for raising safety and reliability standards.

Thank-you for your time and for hearing my voice on this critical matter.

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