



Connecticut School Transportation Association

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Statement by
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Education Committee
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Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, Honorable Members of the Education Committee . . .

My name is William D. Moore. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut School Transportation Association – COSTA. COSTA is a trade association comprised of owners and operators of school buses, student transportation vehicles and other associate members. Our membership of more than 125 companies and Boards of Education includes nearly all of the providers of student transportation in Connecticut. Together, they operate more than 7,200 school buses and 200 Student Transportation Vehicles that transport more than 490,000 children to and from school safely every day.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The industry takes school bus safety very seriously. The safe transportation of children to and from school and to and from school activities is the most important priority for our members. Student transportation providers are well aware that the passengers that they are carrying are more valuable than anything else that anyone can transport.

Riding a school bus is the safest way for children to go school. Last year, twelve children died in America as a result of a school bus accident going to school or returning home at the end of the day. During the same period, 644 children died in accidents not involving school buses.

I would like to correct testimony previously presented to this Committee. Since 1972, when DMV began compiling the records, there has not been a fatality involving a student on a school bus in Connecticut. During that same time, there have been twenty-four accidents involving pedestrian fatalities. Most recently, there were two pedestrian fatalities in 2006.

SAFETY • SERVICE

Despite these tragedies, the school bus industry in Connecticut has one of the best safety records in the country.

I am pleased to be able to comment on Raised Bill 6955, *An Act Concerning Operators' Licenses Bearing a School Endorsement*.

We agree that no one should be allowed to drive a school bus or student transportation vehicle (STV) without the proper endorsement on his or her license. We also agree that the holder of such an endorsement should have his or her background compared against the child abuse registry. We also agree that a temporary operators license should not be issued until background checks – including fingerprint checks - are completed. We are concerned, however, that companies be allowed to continue train drivers under the Commercial Drivers Instructional Permit. We are also concerned about the length of time that it takes to conduct the fingerprint checks. We understand that soon fingerprint checks will be able to be completed electronically. That is certainly welcomed news.

Regarding random urinalysis drug tests, under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations Parts 380, 382, 383, 391 and 392, school bus drivers are subject to random drug and alcohol testing. There are severe penalties for drivers who fail one of the tests. These penalties include immediate removal from driving and mandatory participation in a substance abuse program under the direction of a substance abuse professional before being allowed to return to driving. Under the regulations, those testing positive for drugs are prohibited from driving a school bus for one year. I can't think of a company that would keep a job open for a year for someone who tested positive for drugs. In fact, almost every company and school district has a "Zero Tolerance" policy for those who test positive for drugs and/or alcohol.

The bill requires carriers to submit to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) a monthly report of all of their drivers, and the DMV is required to verify that each driver has a valid license with all of the proper endorsements. We agree that there needs to be a mechanism in place for DMV to notify carriers of a driver's status. The technology must exist to make this a simple process.

Presently, there is no direct way for the DMV to quickly notify the carrier of a change in the drivers' status. It is up to the driver to notify the carrier of any change in their criminal and/or driving status. The DMV makes a suspension list available to those carriers who request it, and COSTA receives the list and distributes it to our members.

The process for obtaining a school bus driver's license is a difficult one, as it should be. I underwent the training and received my school bus driver's license last year. It is not a simple process, and frankly not everyone who applies for the license will pass. In fact, most companies offer new driver training but if the applicant does not pass the test by their third try, the companies will not hire the driver.

Requirements on school bus drivers are already more stringent than on other drivers. As holders of a Commercial Drivers' Licenses, (CDL), a person is disqualified from driving a school bus or other commercial vehicle for sixty days if convicted of two serious traffic violations in

three years. A serious traffic violation means a conviction of any of the following offenses: (A) Speeding in excess of fifteen miles per hour or more over the posted speed limit; (B) reckless driving; (C) following too closely; (D) improper or erratic lane changes; (E) driving a commercial motor vehicle without a valid commercial driver's license; (F) failure to carry a commercial driver's license; (G) failure to have the proper class of license or endorsement, or violation of a license restriction; (H) arising in connection with an accident related to the operation of a commercial motor vehicle and which resulted in a fatality.

A person is disqualified from driving a school bus or other commercial vehicle for one year if convicted of (1) operating *any* motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs; (2) operating a commercial motor vehicle while having a blood alcohol concentration of four-hundredths of one per cent, or more, (3) evasion of responsibility (leaving the scene of an accident) involving a *commercial* motor vehicle; (4) using a commercial motor vehicle in the commission of a felony, or (5) operating a commercial motor vehicle while the operator's commercial driver's license is revoked, suspended or cancelled, or while the operator is disqualified from operating a commercial motor vehicle, or (6) causing a fatality through the negligent or reckless operation of a commercial motor vehicle. Two convictions of any combination of these offenses disqualify a driver for life. A driver is also suspended from driving if he or she has two moving violations in 90 days, or three moving violations in 120 days.

The industry takes its responsibilities seriously, and welcomes the opportunity to comment on this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure. I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

