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Testimony in Support of HB 5856
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am here in support of House Bill 5856 "AN ACT CONCERNING THE EMERGENCY ADMINISTRATION OF EPINEPHRINE ON SCHOOL BUSES AND STUDENT TRANSPORTATION VEHICLES." My name is Dr Deborah Kennedy and I live in Guilford and am the mother of a child with a life-threatening allergy.

My son has a severe peanut allergy and he started attending Kindergarten this year. I was happy to learn that his school had a policy in place to accommodate his needs and ensure his safety. He is currently protected at home, at school, during before and after school activities, field trips, and during summer camp due to the progression of this bill to allow not only nurses to administer an epi-pen but also school personnel including principals, teachers, coaches, and summer camp counselors. I was, however, very surprised to learn that he was not protected when he rides the bus to school. Inclusion of bus drivers under this bill to provide them immunity from their actions involving the administration of an epi-pen would be the first step in ensuring my son and other children with life threatening allergies protection when getting to and from school or camp and thus leaving the child fully protected during his or her school day.

When I contacted his bus company in the beginning of the school year, I was told that bus drivers were not allowed to intervene in a life threatening or any other medical situation. I was also told that most bus drivers would not watch as a child dies and would intervene if necessary even though they are told that they are not permitted to do so. I started the school year with my son carrying his epi-pen in his backpack and notifying his bus driver that it was there. The school has subsequently asked me to remove the epi-pen.

The current policy for any type of medical emergency is to stop the bus, and call dispatch. Dispatch would then call for emergency help. First responders would be alerted to the bus; a policeman or ambulance driver from the fire department. In Guilford, if the first responder is a policeman/woman they do not carry epi-pens and therefore would not be able to provide my son the epinephrine that he needs. My son's allergist at Yale informed me that a **4-minute delay** in the administration of epinephrine " makes or breaks a life". He has seen children die due to a delay in the administration of the epinephrine. It is unlikely that a first responder would be able to get to the bus in North Guilford in this amount of time as it would take that long to stop the bus, assess the situation and make the several phone calls needed to contact emergency service personnel.

Children in the Guilford School district from grade 7 and higher are permitted to carry their own epi-pen on the bus. For those younger, a para-professional is to be allocated to that child to ride the bus with him/her. That leaves our Kindergarteners through 6th graders unprotected. In my son's school, there is a little girl with a life threatening bee allergy. A bee did get on her bus last year and the mother is concerned that she will be stung. Even though her doctor and parent gave permission for her to carry an epi-pen, the school district does not allow it. Her mother has been waiting for a para-professional to be

assigned since the beginning of school with no luck. If that child gets stung it is most likely that she will die before the ambulance can reach the bus.

We have done a great job in the prevention of children experiencing anaphylactic reactions on school transportation vehicles due to their life threatening allergies through several policy suggestions: having the allergic child ride in the front of the bus and not allowing food to be eaten on the bus. I think we have gotten complacent however in our intervention plans and are playing with fire. With the ever-increasing incidence of life threatening allergies, it is just a matter of time before there is an incident on the bus. A recent study determined that **19%** of the cases requiring administration of an epi-pen in 109 school districts in MA occurred while the child was traveling to and from school and on field trips (Peditarics 2005; 116(5)1134-1140). That is almost a 1 in 5 chance that the anaphylactic reaction will occur on a transportation vehicle. Assigning a para-professional to each child would not be cost effective or doable for most school districts. I ask you to intervene now and take the first step in ensuring the safety of our children on school transportation vehicles by passing this bill.

I do see this as a first step. I am not asking for there to be a mandate that bus drivers administer the epi-pen at this time. I am asking that if they choose to intervene then they can do so without fear of liability. In the meantime, I will continue working within our district and with Representative Heinrich to develop a plan to address the remaining concerns, especially who should be allowed to carry the epi-pen. I thank you for your time and your careful consideration of this matter.