

Connecticut School Transportation Association – COSTA

Transportation Committee Public Hearing

March 14, 2011

HB 6581, "An Act Making Revisions to Motor Vehicle Statutes."

My name is Leslie Sheldon and I am the Operations Manager for All-Star Transportation, a school bus company located in Waterbury, CT. I am speaking on behalf of the Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA), which is a trade association comprised of owners and operators of school buses, school transportation vehicles (STV) and other associate members. Together, our companies operate more than 10,000 school buses and student transportation vehicles (STV) that transport nearly 500,000 children to and from school safely each day.

I am here to speak on the safety implications of HB 6581, a bill that would allow school children to be transported by drivers without specialized training. **We are particularly concerned about Section 15.** The industry as a whole feels strongly that all children are precious cargo and they should be transported by properly trained drivers. The safe transportation of children to and from school and to and from school activities should consist of the same properly trained drivers and should not be looked at differently. These drivers drive the same roadways and highways and come across the same situations that school bus drivers and school transportation (STV) drivers face each day.

Presently, CT DMV Regulations (Section 14-276a-4) require that all school bus and student transportation drivers (STV) receive a minimum of ten hours of pre-service training. These topics include:

- (1) Training to obtain a commercial driver's license;
- (2) Techniques for conducting a pre-trip safety inspection and completing a driver's vehicle inspection report (DVIR) as required by Section 14-275c-41 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies;
- (3) Loading and unloading procedures;
- (4) Procedures for crossing railroad tracks;
- (5) Emergency procedures, accident management and evacuation, and instruction relative to the location, contents and use of the first aid kit in the school bus;
- (6) Motor vehicle laws and regulations; and
- (7) Use of passenger restraint systems and special equipment for students with mobility impairments if the driver intends to operate a vehicle so equipped.

In addition to these requirements, drivers are also required to have a minimum of six-(6) hours of training annually (Section 14-276a-5). These topics include:

- (1) Seasonal safety problems affecting driving, and loading and unloading procedures;

- (2) Student management;
- (3) Emergency procedures including first aid and universal precautions;
- (4) Substance use and abuse;
- (5) Communication skills;
- (6) Activity trip procedures;
- (7) Characteristics of students with disabilities; and
- (8) Updates of laws, regulations and policies.

We feel that there is no difference between where these children are being transported: school to home, school to activity, or home to daycare. Each child deserves to be transported by a properly trained driver to ensure each child has the safest ride to and from their destination in the state of Connecticut.

Please allow me to explain some of the training a little more in-depth. A pre-trip inspection must be done on any school bus or student transportation vehicle (STV) (Sec. 14-275c-41) prior to it being operated. The driver must inspect the vehicle to assure it is in safe operating condition. The driver must fill out a driver vehicle inspection report (DVIR). As stated in this section the DVIR shall include reference to the following parts of the vehicle:

- (1) Service brakes
- (2) Parking (hand) brake
- (3) Steering mechanism
- (4) Lighting devices and reflectors
- (5) Tires
- (6) Horn
- (7) Windshield wipers
- (8) All mirrors
- (9) Wheels and rims
- (10) Emergency equipment

Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Procedures for STV drivers (CGS 14-250) is another important topic that is covered during training. Before crossing any railroad tracks STV's are also required to stop at all railroad crossings, whether transporting students or not. There should be no difference in an STV or an activity vehicle. Both vehicles are transporting children; the only thing that is different is the destination. This should mean that an activity driver be required to have the same training as a school bus or STV driver to assure the safety of our children while crossing rail grade crossings in the state of CT.

Loading and unloading students is one of the most trained topics for STV drivers. This is due to the fact that STV's do not have red SOS (Stop On Signal) lights which helps to control traffic and alert motorist that students are loading or unloading. The loading and unloading of children transported in STV's must be done curbside and they also must stop for pickup and drop off on the student's side of the street. In school zones STV's may load or unload in the bus area at school, but they should be aware that they also must obey school bus SOS laws in school parking lots.

Training is provided to drivers so that they are aware of what needs to take place in an emergency or if an accident should occur. Drivers are shown how to use all emergency equipment that is required to be on the vehicle they are driving. The emergency equipment could range from fire extinguishers, first aid kits and triangles but could also include additional items such as seat belt cutter, fire blanket and flash light in some special needs vehicles. Training is provided to drivers to review different types of emergencies as well as different types of evacuations. Training is also provided to help them determine whether to evacuate children from a vehicle or whether they would be safer inside the vehicle. How to evacuate the vehicle and keeping the children safe until help arrives is also reviewed. Activity drivers should be required to have the same training as a school bus or STV driver to assure the safety of our children if an emergency were to take place on any vehicle transporting students in the state of CT.

I could go more in-depth on each topic and explain why an activity driver should receive the same training as a school bus or STV driver is required to receive, but that would take much more time than anyone has today. We (the industry as a whole) believe that it is essential that training be provided to a driver prior to them transporting children and on an annual basis regardless of the destination. Activity drivers are transporting children. Doesn't every parent, guardian or care taker deserve to know that his/her child is being transported by a trained driver? Let's not mislead them and ensure that all drivers receive this essential training that helps make each child's ride safer!

It is for these reasons that we are opposed to **Section 15 HB 6581**, "An Act Making Revisions to Motor Vehicle Statutes" which would eliminate this vital training.