

Testimony in Support of Bill 430, An Act Concerning Emergency Service Personnel

Public Safety and Security Committee

Submitted by Denise Belmont

March 11, 2014

Good Morning Senator Hartley and members of the Public Safety & Security Committee. My name is Denise Belmont, and I live in Middlebury, Connecticut. As a concerned parent, I am here to give my support for Bill 430, An Act Concerning Emergency Service Personnel.

On January 29, 2014 my 9 year old daughter was almost hit by a police car as she was getting off her school bus and crossing the street. The police car, which was responding to an emergency call, came from behind the bus and was passing the already stopped school bus on the left. At the same time, my daughter was crossing the street. I am very thankful that our bus driver is observant and was able to blow her horn in time for my daughter to stop crossing; had she not, my daughter would have been struck by the police car.

I was shocked to learn that emergency vehicles DO NOT have to stop for the flashing lights of a school bus when in route to an emergency call.

The flashing lights of a school bus mean one thing- a child is getting on or off a bus. I am in support of any addition being made to the existing law that would require all emergency vehicles to come to a stop before passing a school bus that has its flashing red signal lights already engaged. This change would ensure that the driver any emergency vehicle is aware of the locations of all children that are off the bus before proceeding through. How could the driver of any emergency vehicle possibly know how many children could be off the bus at that moment?

I realize that time is of the essence when emergency vehicles are in route to a call, but not taking the few seconds to stop & know where all children are before proceeding through a school bus's flashing lights could lead to a child accidentally being hit. And then, that emergency responder would never make it to their call.

I have taken the time to speak with a few different types of emergency responders. It was interesting to learn that ambulance employees and fire fighters are taught that they DO have to stop before proceeding through the flashing lights of a school bus. I was told emergency responders are not supposed to create more emergencies while responding to a call. I think the law needs to be reflective of these practices that some emergency personnel already follow.

I am grateful to Middlebury's Chief of Police, Richard Wildman, who took the time to speak with me the day after this incident took place. He listened to my concerns, and affirmed that the present law DOES NOT require police to stop for school bus signals when in route to an emergency call. But, he did suggest that if I have concerns with the current law, that I have the right to try and change it. And that is why I am here today, to give my support for the improvement of a law that is already in place, to make this law a safer law.

It is unacceptable that any vehicle could be allowed to "slow" and proceed through the signal lights of a school bus. "Slow" is a very subjective term. Did the police officer "slow" as he passed my daughters school bus? I am sure he did. 50mph to 30mph is slowing. But if he was going slow enough that he could have stopped, then why didn't he stop when he saw my daughter was already in the road and crossing?

I am lucky that this incident was just a close call, as my daughter could never be replaced. If this addition to the current law can prevent just one child from accidentally being struck by a vehicle, it would be well worth the change.

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony before this committee.