



**Connecticut School Transportation Association**

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## Public Safety Committee Public Hearing

February 27, 2018

### HB 5220 An Act Authorizing Third-Party Fingerprint Services

Members of the Public Safety Committee, my name is Jean Cronin and I am the legislative representative for the Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA). Thank you for allowing me to offer testimony today on HB 5220, An Act Authorizing Third-Party Fingerprinting Services. COSTA is a trade association comprised of owners and operators of school buses, school transportation vehicles and other associate members. Together, our companies operate more than 10,000 school buses and student transportation vehicles that transport nearly 500,000 children to and from school safely each day.

We are very supportive of this bill that would allow the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to enter into agreements with independent contractors to transmit fingerprints to the State Police Bureau of Identification for processing criminal background checks. This would be a tremendous benefit in helping to reduce the significant backlog of fingerprints for criminal history record checks at DESPP.

The school bus industry is currently experiencing a serious school bus driver shortage primarily because the criminal background check portion of the license application process is taking too long. This license is a combined process between DMV processing the application and DESPP conducting the criminal background checks.

**It has been taking 14-16 weeks to get a school bus driver approved, mainly because of the serious backlog with background checks at DESPP.** Most people do not or cannot wait that long to get approved for a job and as a result, we are losing potential drivers during this four month wait. We have good paying jobs to fill, but the tremendous delay of this process is costing us potential employees and impacting our ability to service our customers.

We had a statute passed several years ago that requires DESPP to process school bus driver background checks within 60 days of receiving the application. This time limit has not really helped, as many hand rolled ("inked) fingerprint cards are rejected by the department as being "illegible" as the 60 day deadline draws near. They send the prints

back to the applicant as “rejected” even though they look perfectly fine. This requires the fingerprints to be redone and resubmitted, further delaying the background check. Interestingly enough, as a test, some of the school bus companies have resubmitted the exact set of fingerprints that were rejected as “illegible” and found that they were approved the second time.

We have met with both DMV and DESPP over the past seven years about this issue. We have learned that the backlog is being caused by a lack of personnel at the Bureau of Identification to process the volume of fingerprint cards and an inadequate computer system to allow for this process to be done electronically. We have been told that the computer system would be updated “soon,” but that never happens. Other agencies seem to obtain bond funds for computer upgrades, but for some reason, that does not seem to be happening here.

The state’s budget difficulties have resulted in hiring freezes and department reductions across all agencies, including DESPP – and legislative mandates for more and more occupations to undergo criminal background checks have only exacerbated the problem. DESPP just cannot keep up with the demand for these background checks.

It makes sense to allow outside contractors to be able to scan and send fingerprints directly to the State Police. Electronically scanning the fingerprints will eliminate the “unreadable” prints from the inked cards and having them immediately transmitted will help reduce the timeframe to get an approval.

This whole process should help significantly reduce the timeframe for getting school bus drivers licensed and will help us reduce our shortage by getting more drivers on the road

We urge you to approve HB 5220.