

Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 646
House Criminal Justice Committee
November 13th, 2018

Chair Manning and Ranking Member Celebrezze, thank you for giving us the opportunity to present sponsor testimony for House Bill 646 in committee today.

I introduced the bill this past May with Rep. Scherer. Since that time, House Bill 646 has become even more relevant in recent weeks as a result of several tragic incidents throughout our nation. Over a three day period at the beginning of this month, five children have been struck by cars while waiting for the school bus. In an Indiana incident, three siblings were run down and killed by a motorist passing a stopped school bus.¹ Innocent children are being killed in our streets while they are simply trying to get to school.

Unfortunately, drivers choosing to pass stopped school buses is not an uncommon occurrence. According to an ABC News study of the issue in the Dallas Metro Area, 92,000 tickets had been issued for passing a stopped school bus in the past three years.² Further, the Ohio State Highway Patrol alone has ticketed 2,747 people for this violation since 2013.

Presently, Ohio has no increasing penalty for drivers who are cited for this violation multiple times. States as diverse as Florida, Maine, Nevada and Texas all have laws to more severely punish drivers who put our children at risk.

House Bill 646 would put Ohio on par with other states and increase penalties for repeat offenders. Ohio law currently levies a maximum \$500 fine and a class 7 suspension for passing a stopped school bus, and has no increased penalty for a second offense. Our bill would put Ohio on an equal footing with other Midwestern states by imposing a \$1000 fine, 2 license points and/or a class 5 suspension of the violator's license for any additional offense in 5 years.

My joint sponsor, Representative Scherer, will further elaborate on the broad support that this bill has and why it is so important that we pass it. I urge the committee, for the sake of our children, to swiftly consider this bill for passage.

Thank you again to Chair Manning and Ranking Member Celebrezze for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

I too want to thank Chair Manning and Ranking Member Celebrezze for allowing us to give testimony today on this important piece of legislation.

School safety is a top issue for both Republicans and Democrats. I believe that this is a measure that we have put forward that transcends partisanship and can be broadly supported. When the co-sponsor request for this bill was circulated, our offices received broad support from members on both sides of the aisle.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/01/us/tampa-school-bus-stop-vehicle-hits-students/index.html>

² <https://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/danger-school-bus-stop-30689340>

Along with Speaker Smith, this bill has gained the support of five Democrats and three Republicans as co-sponsors. I believe that it is vitally important that we work together on issues surrounding school safety that we can agree upon, and this is absolutely one of those issues. It is important to note that twenty four percent of all school transportation injuries occur while students are getting on or off the bus. I believe that House Bill 646 can make a difference in reducing that number by deterring drivers from ignoring the law and punishing those who chose to do so multiple times.

In terms of the process of consulting with interested parties, we have found that House Bill 646 has broad support. Among those groups that are supportive are the Ohio School Boards Association, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators, and the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators. Broadly, the community of people who are involved in the education and protection of our students feel that this bill will take a positive step towards increasing student safety and helping to prevent tragedies like those that we have seen in previous weeks.

In the aftermath of the incidences that Representative Brown described, both of our offices have heard from Ohioans that they would like to see action from the state legislature on this issue. House Bill 646 is an important common sense and bi-partisan step to take in the goal of protecting our students as they travel to and from school.

I urge the committee to move forward with this bill and I want to thank you all for your consideration of House Bill 646. Representative Brown and I would now be happy to take any questions that you may have.