



Good morning Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, and Ranking Member Leland, my name is James Sotlar, Superintendent of Canal Winchester Local Schools in Franklin County, and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support House Bill 83, School bus safety.

Each year in the United States, children are put at risk, injured and even killed by drivers who illegally pass school buses. It is a problem that has increased over the past 10 years due to more drivers on our highways and more devices that distract drivers. School buses are equipped with yellow lights that warn drivers they are going to stop, and red lights that let drivers know that they are stopped, but unfortunately many drivers still pass a stopped bus.

The Ohio School Boards Association did a survey in 2019 (1) on school bus red-light violations and they estimate that Ohio may have as many as 4,500 violations a day. A breakdown of those violations found that 45% of the illegal passing occurred in the morning and 52% of illegally passing was in the afternoon. 73% of the violators illegally passed a bus approaching from the front and 27% of illegally passed buses were passed from the rear. These are unacceptable numbers and something needs done to immediately address the major safety concern.

The main responsibility of our school bus drivers is to get students to and from school in a safe manner. Their focus is on driving safely and maintaining discipline on of the bus. It is very challenging for them to get the license plate number and general description of the vehicle when a light violation occurs, Being allowed to use cameras as evidence in a red-light violations would greatly help and would provide another layer of protection for our students.

In Canal Winchester, we have over 2400 students who ride the bus daily and each year our bus drivers report approximately 50 red-light violations each year. Now this does not mean we only have 50 violations. What it means is that we have about 50 occurrences during a school year where a driver observes a violation, gets a description of the driver and the vehicle, AND then write down that vehicle's license plate number. Our actual number of violations each year is more like 100. This comes from viewing video in the past. Half of these violations are due to distracted driving and the other half come from drivers simply choosing to run the red lights of a school bus.

The passage of House Bill 83 would take the sole burden off of school bus drivers to write the license plate number along with a general description of the vehicle and its operator and would allow the images and video from the camera recording the violation to corroborate any information provided by the bus driver to help identify the violator.



Some may feel that new government mandates are an infringement on their rights, or some may even debate the merits of deterrence based on a stricter penalty, however the safety of our school children should be our number one priority. And the passage of House Bill 83 will strengthen our ability to protect our school children who ride a bus.

Once again, thank you Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, and Ranking Member Leland for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 83.

¹ Sub. SB 134 Proponent Testimony