

**From: Melody Coniglio**

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The removal of the front license plates from motor vehicles in Ohio next year will make it tougher to apprehend reckless motorists who fail to stop for school buses when they are loading or unloading students.

Too many drivers don't stop their vehicles when a school bus activates its flashing red lights, which means it is either picking up or dropping off students.

The American School Bus Council estimates that more than 10 million drivers illegally pass school buses each year. I believe the problem is worsening, and so do many other transportation professionals and law enforcement. As Director of Transportation at Kenston Local Schools in Geauga County and the President of the Ohio Association for Pupil Transportation, I closely monitor such "red light violations," whether that is through our bus drivers or other professional organizations doing studies on the topic.

Perhaps motorists are in a hurry or distracted by their cell phones. Whatever the reason, this has proven to be very dangerous for many school children. Violators need to be held accountable for their actions.

Our state leaders are offering up mixed signals regarding school bus safety. On the positive side, Ohio Sen. Theresa Gavarone has introduced a bill that calls for increasing penalties for illegally passing a school bus. Stronger penalties would help send a message about the importance of protecting our schoolchildren.

Unfortunately, the state legislature earlier this year passed a provision – slipped into a larger bill – that would no longer require front license plates on motor vehicles in Ohio beginning July 2020.

This would reduce the chances of identifying dangerous drivers who endanger our schoolchildren when they ignore warnings to stop for school buses. Some school districts have cameras on the outside of buses, which helps law enforcement issue citations. But many school districts – particularly the disadvantaged and more rural districts in Ohio – don't have these cameras, which can be costly.

By removing the front plate, the state will significantly reduce bus drivers' ability to identify careless motorists who don't stop.

State law for stopping when a school bus is flashing its red lights is simple. On a road with fewer than four lanes, all traffic approaching the bus from either direction must stop. If the bus stops on a road with four or more lanes, traffic heading in the same direction as the bus must stop.

Police can't be everywhere. We need all the tools we can get to enforce this crucial law, which is violated with alarming regularity, as noted in a growing number of media reports across the state.

From what I have read, supporters of removing the front plate say that their vehicles will be more attractive without the front plate. If that is truly the reason behind this misguided effort, it falls far short. I encourage the state to retain the front license plate and make decisions based on public safety and not for any other reason.

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