



House Finance Committee

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Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 74

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on this bill. My name is Melody Coniglio, I am the Director of Transportation for Kenston Local Schools in Geauga County and serve as Past-President of the Ohio Association for Pupil Transportation.

The removal of front license plates from motor vehicles in Ohio has made it tougher to apprehend reckless motorists who fail to stop for school buses when they are loading or unloading students. Current laws state that we need to see the driver of the vehicle. With the removal of the front plate it has forced the school district to flip the camera around on the buses to capture the rear plate. Thus hoping the bus driver has seen the other driver to provide a good enough description of the person so that the local law enforcement agency can issue a citation.

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 Past 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 note, legislation has been introduced to see that children get to school safely. Bills like SB 133 call for increasing penalties for illegally passing a school bus. Stronger penalties would help send a message about the importance of protecting our school children, but would do little without the front plate and driver picture from the buses camera system.



Removal of the front plate has reduced the chances of identifying dangerous drivers who endanger our school children when they ignore warnings to stop for school buses. Some school districts have cameras on the outside of buses. Those districts had to turn the camera around to catch the rear plate number in hopes that the bus driver will be able to give a description of the other driver. The state has significantly reduced bus drivers' ability to identify careless motorists who don't stop with the removal of the front plate, since there is no footage of the front plate and driver.

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.

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 reconsider the absence of the front license plate and make decisions based on public safety and not for any other reason.