



Representative Bernie Bunyan Willis

74th House District

Sub House Bill 3- Sponsor Testimony

March 20th, 2025

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and fellow distinguished members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 3, a comprehensive and carefully considered bill focused on advancing school bus safety across our state. I am grateful for your time and commitment to examining this legislation that aims to protect our students during their daily commutes.

As you know, I originally introduced this bill last General Assembly as a placeholder following a tragic incident in my county where a young man's life was cut short due to a school bus accident. In response to this incident, the Governor convened a task force to address school bus safety. This task force proposed 13 recommended safety features, which we have incorporated into this bill. Significant changes have been made to the initial draft, and I am pleased to say that this legislation is now in a great state thanks to the result of listening to the voices from constituents, and organizations alike across the state.

To begin, H.B. 3 establishes stronger criminal penalties for violations of school bus safety laws. Under this provision, offenders will face a minimum fine of \$250. However, for first-time offenders, judges will have the discretion to offer an educational course in place of the points and a reduced fine of \$150—reflecting both the seriousness of the offense and a path for reform.

Next, all 13 recommended safety features from the Ohio School Bus Safety Group are included in this bill. However, these features are permissive, allowing each school district the flexibility to determine which safety measures best meet their needs. As we worked through this legislation, an additional 14th feature was brought to our attention that would make these buses even safer. This amendment added silent panic alert technology and broadband push-to-talk capabilities to the list of school bus safety features that are eligible for grants under the bill's School Bus Safety Grant Program. This approach ensures that districts can adapt the law to fit their unique situations without being held to a minimum number of features to qualify for funding.

Additionally, the bill allocates resources toward public service announcement (PSA) education campaigns. These PSAs will be essential in raising public awareness about the new changes and the importance of school bus safety, ensuring that everyone on our roads understands their role in

protecting young lives. In support of these efforts, the month of August will be designated as “School Bus Safety Awareness Month,” focusing our attention on these changes at the start of each school year. While we understand that the national week takes place in October, most schools begin in August, and we felt this would be more appropriate as a result.

Finally, we have proposed an appropriation of \$10 million to fund this legislation, supporting districts in making these critical safety updates. This bill has been a major collaborative effort between numerous interested parties across the state and nation. I would like to take a moment to thank former Chairman McClain for working so tightly with us to hear the voices from all different groups to make this legislation as great as possible. I would be remiss if I didn’t thank Judge Brown for all the insight, he offered us last General Assembly to get this bill to where it is today.

As always, I welcome any questions or concerns you may have. Thank you once again for your attention and for your commitment to protecting Ohio’s students. I look forward to continued collaboration on this essential initiative and am hopeful that, together, we can move forward to enact these lifesaving changes. I am happy to turn the floor over to my Joint Sponsor Representative Thomas.