



Representative Cecil Thomas

25th House District

House Bill 3- Sponsor Testimony

March 11th, 2025

Vice Chair Daniels, Ranking Member Grim, and distinguished members of the House Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 3, the School Bus Safety Act. It is an honor to stand here as a joint sponsor of this critical piece of legislation alongside Representative Willis.

The tragedy that led to the development of this bill is an unimaginable loss for the affected families. It serves as a stark reminder of the urgency with which we must act to prevent similar tragedies in the future. The loss of any child is unacceptable, and we must take bold steps to ensure that no family ever faces such grief again. This bill is not just a response to a tragedy—it is a call for change. It's time to set a new standard for student safety on our roads.

House Bill 3 does more than adopt the recommendations of the Ohio School Bus Safety Working Group—it builds on those recommendations to create a comprehensive framework for safety that we, as a state, can stand behind with confidence. This legislation acknowledges that safety is not negotiable, and it sends a clear message: we will not tolerate unsafe driving near school buses.

The bill's focus on education is especially important. By not only increasing penalties for violations but also offering first-time offenders the opportunity to take an educational course, we strike a balance between accountability and the chance for drivers to learn and improve. The option to complete this course to avoid points on a license and reduce fines is a forward-thinking solution that promotes responsible driving while encouraging growth and understanding.

Additionally, the bill tackles both the immediate and long-term safety of our students. The 13 recommended safety features are not just suggestions—they are critical elements designed to reduce risk and prevent accidents. Allowing local school districts the flexibility to choose which features best suit their needs ensures that every district can implement the most effective solutions for their unique circumstances. This will result in better protection for students across Ohio, regardless of the district's size or resources.

Moreover, the establishment of the School Bus Safety Fund, with a \$25 million allocation, demonstrates a real, tangible investment in our children's futures. This funding will help ensure that even the most resource-constrained districts can make these necessary safety upgrades, eliminating the financial barriers to providing a safe environment for our students.

Finally, I want to underscore that this legislation is the result of a thoughtful, inclusive collaboration involving experts, lawmakers, and stakeholders who share a common goal: to keep our children safe. I thank my co-sponsor, Representative Willis, and I echo our gratitude to former Chairman McClain and Judge Brown for their leadership. This bill reflects the collective effort of all involved and embodies our shared responsibility to protect Ohio's children.

House Bill 3 is not just another piece of legislation—it is a critical shift in how we prioritize the safety of our children. It holds drivers accountable, invests in safety measures, and empowers school districts to implement the most effective solutions for their communities.

I urge this committee to act decisively and move this bill forward. Our children deserve nothing less than our unwavering commitment to their safety. Let's take this opportunity to make Ohio's roads safer for every student who boards a school bus. Together, we can prevent future tragedies and give families the peace of mind they deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.