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Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 23
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
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Chairman Hoagland, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, I am happy to be before you today to speak about Senate Bill 23. This much-needed piece of legislation will improve our state both by giving school districts the opportunity to equip cameras on their entire fleet of school buses without a single dime of taxpayer funds and raising awareness for the vital issue of school bus safety.

First, let me state that this legislation is a solution to a growing problem across the country—failing to stop for a school bus. As the Columbus Dispatch reported, from 2015-2017 nearly 4,200 drivers in Ohio were **ticketed** for illegally passing a bus. I emphasize the word ticketed because it is often difficult for a school bus driver to catch a license plate number or identify a driver, so the actual number of violations is much greater. In that same period, there were over 4,000 school bus crashes.¹

This issue really came to the forefront for me after learning about two incidents involving students from schools in my district. The first was a car that crashed into an Eastwood school bus as the result of not stopping² and the second involved a bus from Archbold schools that was hit by a speeding semi-truck. The latter was recorded and featured in the national news because two children narrowly escaped the accident.³

Fortunately, no students were hurt in those accidents, but nearly a decade ago in my district 15-year-old Morgan Duris was hit and killed after a driver going 15 miles over the speed limit failed to stop for her bus.⁴ These incidents are all too common, and I believe the bill before you today will lessen them and keep our children safer as they go to and from school.

¹ Franklin County Had 691 School Bus Crashes in 2015-2017, Leading the State (<https://www.dispatch.com/news/20180804/franklin-county-had-691-school-bus-crashes-in-2015-17-leading-state>)

² Eastwood Leaders Have a Plea for Drivers After Bus Accident (<https://www.wtol.com/article/text/news/eastwood-leaders-have-a-plea-for-drivers-after-bus-accident/512-1b166c65-f6cd-4994-b7e8-bd7b44292b68>)

³ Speeding Semi-Truck Crashes Into Schools Bus (<https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/News/video/speeding-semi-truck-slams-school-bus-62002592>)

⁴ Northview Freshman, 15, Hit, Killed on Way to Bus in Sylvania (<https://www.toledoblade.com/local/2010/01/22/Northview-freshman-15-hit-killed-on-way-to-bus-in-Sylvania/stories/201001220031>)

The legislation would create a civil penalty process to penalize drivers \$300 for illegally passing a school bus. \$250 of that money would be issued to the school district, \$25 would be sent to local law enforcement and \$25 would go to the 'School Bus Safety and Education Fund', a newly created fund through the Ohio Treasurer. The fund will enhance school bus safety and raise public awareness of the laws governing school bus safety.

Now, I mentioned that school districts would have the opportunity to install cameras on their buses without taxpayer funds. That is because once this bill goes into law, school districts could contract with one of numerous companies that cover the costs of the cameras, as well as installation and maintenance, in return for a portion of the citation money. To prevent a money grab situation, the caveat to this legislation is that a district must have cameras on all active buses, not just the ones that could be seen as driving on "profitable" routes.

It is important to note that there is no requirement for school districts to contract with anyone before being able to participate in this civil process. If a school district previously purchased cameras or would like to purchase cameras for their entire fleet, they would then be able to participate in this process.

To be clear, if someone passes a school bus illegally and there is sufficient evidence to prosecute the driver criminally, the driver can be prosecuted. And, Senate Bill 23 includes specific language to allow for a clear image, images or video to be used to identify a driver illegally passing a school bus or the license plate. A driver can be criminally prosecuted or issued a civil citation, but not both.

The goal of the legislation is to change behavior and make sure people are obeying school bus laws. We need to protect Ohio's children. The potential to be issued a \$300 ticket or criminally prosecuted could be a very effective motivator.

Finally, the bill would designate August as "School Bus Safety Awareness Month".

Quite simply, there is no excuse for illegally passing a stopped school bus. Getting to your destination 15 seconds earlier is not more important than the lives of our children. Without a doubt, this bill will increase awareness of stopping for school buses, make drivers think twice about illegally passing a school bus, and hold drivers who show little to no regard for the safety of children accountable for their actions.

Chairman Hoagland, thank you for allowing me to testify, and I am ready to answer any questions from members of the committee.