

Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Transportation Committee

Public Hearing: School Bus Safety
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Presented by:
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Good Morning, Chairmen Markosek and Geist, and members of the House Transportation Committee. I am Corporal Robert J. Krol of the Pennsylvania State Police. I am the Supervisor of the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) Operations Unit, within the Commercial Vehicle Safety Section, under the Safety Programs Division of the Bureau of Patrol. On behalf of Colonel Jeffrey B. Miller, the Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police, I would like to thank you for the invitation to provide testimony at this public hearing concerning school bus safety.

Overall highway safety continues to be a major goal of the Pennsylvania State Police. In working towards this goal, one objective of the Pennsylvania State Police is to ensure the safety of school buses which transport pupils to and from school and school-related activities. We recognize that these school buses are transporting some of the most precious cargo on the Commonwealth's highway system.

School buses within the Commonwealth are required to undergo various inspections to ensure that they are maintained in safe and proper operating condition, and that they are in compliance with Pennsylvania Department of Transportation regulations. As mandated by the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code, Section 4702, relating to Requirement for Periodic Inspection of Vehicles, school buses are required to undergo Pennsylvania state inspection on a semiannual basis. This inspection is performed by licensed Pennsylvania state inspection

mechanics to ensure compliance with Title 67, Pennsylvania Code, Chapter 175, relating to Vehicle Equipment and Inspection. Providing a school bus meets the requirements of Chapter 175, an official certificate of inspection is affixed to the vehicle by the licensed mechanic.

The Pennsylvania Vehicle Code also mandates an additional inspection for school buses, as listed in Section 4705, relating to Inspection of Vehicles for Transportation of School Children. This section requires that the owner of every school bus shall, in addition to any other inspection required by Chapter 47, submit the vehicle to the Pennsylvania State Police annually prior to operating the vehicle for the transportation of school children during the school year. The purpose of the inspection is to determine whether the school bus conforms to the provisions of Chapter 47, including regulations promulgated by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

The majority of these inspections are completed during the months of June through August, each year. Inspections completed during this period are part of the Pennsylvania State Police annual school bus inspection campaign. It is important to note that these inspections are scheduled in advance with the school districts and contractors, providing them ample time to ensure their school buses are prepared for inspection. The purpose of the Pennsylvania State Police annual inspection is to verify that they are in compliance with the regulations.

The Pennsylvania State Police inspection of school buses includes an inspection of vehicle parts and components similar to the inspection done by a licensed Pennsylvania state inspection mechanic; however, the Pennsylvania State Police inspection also ensures compliance with the provisions of Title 67, Pennsylvania Code, Chapter 171, relating to School Buses and School Vehicles. Chapter 171 contains many school bus requirements which are not inspected by Pennsylvania state inspection program mechanics. For example, Chapter 171 regulates required emergency equipment, school bus color, and markings. A school bus does not pass the Pennsylvania State Police inspection unless it is in full compliance with all applicable regulations. Upon successful completion of this inspection, the inspecting member affixes a Pennsylvania State Police inspection certificate to the school bus.

In regard to inspecting school buses for compliance with Title 67, Pennsylvania Code, Chapter 171, the current regulations are applicable only to school buses manufactured or converted on or after September 14, 1996. School buses manufactured or converted prior to this date are required to comply with the regulations in effect at the time they were manufactured or converted. The regulations of Chapter 171 prior to the current version have an effective date of September 1, 1983. Due to the differences between these two sets of regulations, they are commonly referred to as the New Chapter 171 and the Old Chapter 171. For this reason, when conducting inspections, Pennsylvania State Police personnel must consider the date of manufacture so that the proper

regulatory requirements may be inspected for compliance during the inspection process.

In addition to the annual school bus inspection campaign, the Pennsylvania State Police monitors school bus safety and compliance with the regulations throughout the school year through a spot check inspection process. The spot check inspection is unannounced, and it is normally performed at schools after the students have disembarked. A spot check includes an examination of the operator's credentials and at least a walk around inspection of the school bus. This inspection also includes, but is not limited to, the eight way school bus warning light system, side signal stop arm, front crossing control gate, and other parts and accessories visible during a walk around inspection such as tires and lights.

During calendar year 2006, Pennsylvania State Police personnel conducted a total of 28,044 school bus inspections, as mandated by Section 4705 of the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code. Also, during the calendar year 2006, the Pennsylvania State Police conducted 1,775 spot check inspections.

In consideration of House Bill 1793, which seeks to prohibit the use of a school bus for pupil transportation purposes beyond the end of the twelfth year from the date of manufacture, I examined the preliminary inspection results from the 2007 annual school bus inspection campaign. The examination consisted of

25,309 school buses that were inspected statewide. This number was broken down into 2,598 that were model year 1995 or older, and 22,711 that were model year 1996 through 2008.

Of the 2,598 school buses in the 1995 and older group, there were a total of 3,411 violations discovered. There were 349 (10%) of these violations that were serious enough to be listed as out-of-service violations under the North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria, which placed 274 (11%) of the school buses inspected out of service. Further examination of this group revealed that only 1,089 school buses (42%) had no violations discovered.

In regard to the 22,711 school buses in the 1996 through 2008 model year group, there were a total of 18,272 violations discovered. There were 1,452 (8%) of these that were serious enough to be listed as out-of-service violations, and they resulted in 1,183 (5%) of the school buses in this group being placed out of service. Further examination of this group revealed that only 13,025 school buses (57%) had no violations discovered.

Based on review of the proposed amendment to the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code by creating Section 4554, relating to Duration of Use of School Buses, as listed in House Bill 1793, I would like to point out that the date of vehicle manufacture is not currently listed on the Pennsylvania vehicle registration card, as referenced in the section's language. Pennsylvania State Police personnel

would obtain this information by examining the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Certification Label. This label has been required since 1970 on all vehicles distributed in the United States. Along with the required certification statement, the label must display the date of assembly and the vehicle identification number.

In conclusion, on behalf of Colonel Miller and the entire Pennsylvania State Police, I again want to thank you for the opportunity to address your Committee. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.