

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 247**

**Automated Enforcement System on School Buses Pilot Program Act**

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**Submitted by State Representative Robert W. Godshall  
to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Transportation  
Committee**

**Informational Hearing on School Bus Safety**

**Sept. 17, 2007**

Greetings to the members of the Pennsylvania State House Transportation Committee. As prime sponsor of House Bill 247, I want to thank you for permitting me to submit this written testimony in support of my legislation, which I firmly believe will help to protect school children being transported in school buses and will hold accountable those motorists who illegally pass a stopped school bus that is boarding or discharging children.

House Bill 247, known as the Automated Enforcement System on School Buses Pilot Program Act, proposes to establish a one-year pilot program in one school district in the Commonwealth, under which the district's school buses would be equipped with on-board motion sensors and cameras to detect and record motorists who illegally pass a stopped school bus. The sensors and cameras, placed on the sides of the bus, would be activated as soon as the bus stops and its flashing red lights are activated. The cameras would automatically take a photo of the offending vehicle and its license plate number, while the sensor would trigger an alarm inside the bus to alert the driver and students of the safety hazard.

My legislation authorizes the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) to administer the pilot program. The department would be responsible for publicizing the program, developing an application procedure for interested school districts, selecting one school district from the list of applicants, and providing a one-time grant to that school district to implement the pilot program. The amount of that grant could not be more than \$100,000 and could not be derived from the Motor License Fund.

PennDOT also would be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the pilot program and presenting a report of the evaluation to the Transportation Committee of the Senate and the Transportation Committee of the House of Representatives.

I originally introduced this legislation during the 2003-2004 legislative session as House Bill 1315. It was introduced on May 14, 2003, approved by this committee on March 15, 2004, and unanimously passed the House on March 24, 2004. The Senate Transportation Committee approved House Bill 1315 on Nov. 8, 2004, but unfortunately the full Senate did not take action on the legislation before the legislative session expired.

I reintroduced the legislation as House Bill 328 at the start of the 2005-2006 legislative session, however no action was taken on the bill during that session.

I am pleased to see that the House Transportation Committee is again considering the bill in the current legislative session because I remain convinced that it can successfully address what has become a serious problem, not only in Pennsylvania but around the nation. Whether because of inattentiveness, inconsideration, or ignorance, hundreds of thousands of motorists every day across this nation ignore the flashing red lights of a stopped school bus and pass it while the bus is boarding or discharging school children. (New York state alone estimates that 50,000 vehicles per day illegally pass school buses).

Too often the results are tragic. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that an average of 19 school children are killed every year in this nation as they attempt to get on or off school buses. Most of those children are between five and seven years old.

The School Bus Information Council publishes a fact sheet that includes the following quote: "Motorists illegally passing a stopped school bus remains a problem in every community, and the school bus industry urges strict police and judicial enforcement against violators."

Pennsylvania's existing school bus stopping law is outlined in Section 3345 of the state's Vehicle Code (Title 75 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes). Violation of the law is a summary offense that carries a \$250 fine, a 60-day suspension of a driver's license, and an assessment of five points on the offender's driving record.

Enforcing the existing law is the challenge. School bus drivers have 48 hours to report a violation to police, who then can issue a citation. However, it is often difficult for the bus driver to make an accurate identification of the vehicle and plate number while simultaneously focusing on the safety of the children he or she is transporting. There is no doubt that a camera mounted on the bus would help in this regard because it would snap a photo that would catch the violator in the act.

The school bus safety proposal contained in House Bill 247 was initially developed in 2003 by three sixth-grade students who at the time attended Kulp Elementary School in Hatfield Township, Montgomery County. Kulp Elementary is part of North Penn School District, one of the school districts in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Legislative District that I represent.

Nicholas Burkwit, Tracey Hickey and Tyler Schultz distinguished themselves and the entire North Penn School District in 2003 when their idea and its practical application as a school project won the prestigious Christopher Columbus Award and an accompanying \$25,000 Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation Community Grant. The foundation sponsors a national technology and science-based competition for sixth- through eighth-graders annually. The foundation is an independent federal government agency that encourages and supports research in all fields of endeavor for the benefit of mankind.

After meeting with the students and observing the successful implementation of their idea during a test run on a North Penn school bus, I decided to introduce legislation that would establish a one-year pilot program implementing the automated enforcement system in a school district in Pennsylvania.

In closing, I should note for the committee's information that National School Bus Safety Week is coming up Oct. 22-26. This year's theme is "Stop on Red, Kids Ahead." I think the selection of that theme illustrates the fact that the illegal passing of stopped school buses is a real problem and poses a real threat to the safety of our school children. I also think that House Bill 247 offers a real solution. I urge this committee to give its approval to this legislation as we work together in the effort to save children's lives. Thank you.

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