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Rep. John Galloway  
School Bus Safety Remarks  
House Transportation Committee Hearing on H.B. 1793  
Sept. 17, 2007

APPROPRIATE GREETINGS.

WHAT'S BIG AND YELLOW AND COMES IN THE MORNING TO BRIGHTEN A PARENT'S DAY? A SCHOOL BUS!

THE BIG, YELLOW SCHOOL BUS IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF CHILDHOOD AND GROWING UP.

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FROM TAKING LITTLE KIDS TO SCHOOL FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME, TO TRANSPORTING A TROOP OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS TO THEIR GRADUATION SITE, WE DEPEND ON OUR SCHOOL BUSES TO PROVIDE SAFE TRANSPORTATION FOR OUR CHILDREN. AND, FOR THE MOST PART THEY DO.

ACCORDING TO A 2002 STUDY BY THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, SCHOOL BUSES ARE THE SAFEST WAY TO TRANSPORT CHILDREN. THE REPORT STATED THAT EACH YEAR APPROXIMATELY 800 SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN ARE KILLED IN MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES DURING NORMAL SCHOOL TRAVEL HOURS. OF THESE 800 DEATHS – ONLY 2-PERCENT ARE SCHOOL BUS-RELATED.

OUR SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS ARE WELL TRAINED, AND I DON'T DOUBT THAT THEY ARE VERY CAUTIOUS AND CAREFUL BEHIND THE WHEEL. AND I DON'T DOUBT THAT OUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKE GOOD CARE OF THEIR SCHOOL BUSES TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE IN GOOD RUNNING CONDITION.

BUT I BELIEVE WE CAN – AND SHOULD – DO BETTER. OUR STATE LACKS A UNIFORM TIMELINE OF WHEN A SCHOOL BUS SHOULD BE RETIRED FROM DUTY. AND THAT, I FEAR, COULD SOMEDAY LEAD TO A SCHOOL BUS TRAGEDY.

ACCORDING TO PENNDOT – IN 2005, PENNSYLVANIA HAD NEARLY 30,000 REGISTERED SCHOOL BUSES TRANSPORTING OVER 1-AND-A-HALF MILLION STUDENTS DAILY. AND COLLECTIVELY TRAVEL OVER 350-MILLION MILES ANNUALLY.

MOST OF OUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS, APPROXIMATELY 85-PERCENT OF THEM, CONTRACT OUT FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION SERVICE. AND THE ONLY LANGUAGE IN PENNSYLVANIA LAW REGARDING THE MAINTENANCE AND SERVICE REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUSES IS IN TITLE 67 OF THE PENNSYLVANIA CODE WHICH STATES:

SCHOOL BUSES AND SCHOOL VEHICLES SHALL BE SERVICED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE RECOMMENDED BY THE MANUFACTURER OF THE SCHOOL BUS OR VEHICLE.

THERE IS NO MENTION OF HOW LONG A SCHOOL BUS SHOULD STAY ON THE ROAD.

THAT IS WHY I INTRODUCE HOUSE BILL 17-93, AND WHY I COME BEFORE YOU TODAY SEEKING YOUR SUPPORT.

MY LEGISLATION, “THE SCHOOL BUS SERVICE LIFETIME SAFETY BILL,” WOULD REQUIRE PENNDOT TO ADOPT A MAXIMUM SERVICE LIFETIME FOR ALL PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL BUSES OF 12 YEARS.

SINCE SCHOOL BUSES VARY IN SIZE, CAPABILITY AND USE, MY LEGISLATION WOULD GIVE PENNDOT THE DISCRETION TO ADOPT VARYING LIFETIMES FOR VARYING TYPES OF BUSES – BUT NONE COULD EXCEED 12 YEARS.

THIS BILL WOULD CREATE CONSISTENCY REGARDING THE AGE OF SCHOOL BUSES – SOMETHING WHICH IS GROSSLY LACKING IN PENNSYLVANIA.

A 2002 REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF PUPIL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES REGARDING SCHOOL BUS REPLACEMENT RECOMMENDED THAT AFTER A PERIOD OF TIME, SCHOOL BUSES BE RETIRED. IT SUGGESTED A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN THE INCREASED MAINTENANCE NEEDS OF OLDER SCHOOL BUSES AND INCREASED POSSIBILITY OF A MALFUNCTION.<sup>1</sup> I HAVE INCLUDED A COPY OF THEIR FINDINGS WITH MY REMARKS FOR YOUR REVIEW.

I BASED MY LEGISLATION OF MAXIMUM LIFETIME FOR SCHOOL BUSES AT 12 YEARS ON A PAIR OF STUDIES – ONE DONE IN CALIFORNIA, THE OTHER IN WASHINGTON STATE, THAT FOUND AFTER 12 YEARS OF USE, THE ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS OF SCHOOL BUSES BEGINS TO INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY.

ANYONE WHO HAS EVER OWNED A CAR KNOWS THIS – THE OLDER THE VEHICLE THE MORE EXPENSIVE IT IS TO KEEP ON THE ROAD. AT SOME POINT YOU HAVE TO EVALUATE IF IT'S CHEAPER TO KEEP FIXING THE CAR OR JUST GET A NEW ONE. FOR THAT REASON, I BELIEVE MY LEGISLATION WOULD SAVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE LONG-RUN.

ADD STUDENT SAFETY TO THE EQUATION AND I THINK YOU'LL AGREE THAT IT'S TIME FOR PENNSYLVANIA TO ADOPT A MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE FOR SCHOOL BUSES.

I KNOW THAT THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION HAS AN ISSUE WITH AN ASPECT OF MY LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PUNISH THE BUS DRIVER FOR OPERATING A BUS THAT'S OLDER THAN 12 YEARS. THE PSEA ARGUES THAT THE EMPLOYER SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE, NOT THE EMPLOYEE WHO WOULD BE FACED WITH THE CHOICE OF EITHER BEING INSUBORDINATE OR BREAKING THE LAW.

BECAUSE IT IS THE BUS DRIVER WHO GETS BEHIND THE WHEEL AND TRANSPORTS OUR CHILDREN, HE, OR SHE, IS OUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE IN KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE. I AM WILLING TO WORK WITH THE PSEA ON THIS ISSUE TO SEE IF THERE IS A COMPROMISE WE CAN REACH.

MY GOAL IS TO ENSURE THE SAFEST BUSES POSSIBLE. I BELIEVE WE BOTH SHARE THAT GOAL.

NEW JERSEY AND MARYLAND HAVE ALREADY ADOPTED A TIMELINE FOR SCHOOL BUSES – NEW JERSEY LAW MANDATES ALL BUSES USED TO TRANSPORT PUPILS BE RETIRED AFTER 12 YEARS. MARYLAND REQUIRES FAR MORE STRINGENT INSPECTIONS OF BUSES 12 YEARS AND OLDER.

BY ENACTING THE SCHOOL BUS SERVICE LIFETIME SAFETY BILL, PENNSYLVANIA WOULD EFFECTIVELY SET A HIGHER, AND WELL DESERVED STANDARD, FOR TRANSPORTING OUR MOST PRECIOUS CARGO – OUR CHILDREN.