

Senate and House Transportation Committees Joint Hearing
“Enhancing the Safety of Highway Workers, Drivers and Pedestrians”
PSBA Testimony on HB 1249, PN 1642 - July 14, 2015

Good Morning Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Wozniak and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee and Chairman Taylor, Chairman Keller and Members of the House Transportation Committee.

My name is Fred Bennett, President of Fishing Creek Transportation. Fishing Creek Transportation is located in Orangeville, Columbia County. I am also Chair of the Legislative Committee and President-Elect of the Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA). The Pennsylvania School Bus Association is made up of 330 private school bus contractors who provide student bus services to school districts. More than 85% of the School Districts in Pennsylvania use contractors to provide student transportation services. A majority of those contractors are members of the PSBA. As an Association, our focus is to promote and foster the highest degree of safety in the transportation of school children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about student safety and the installation of stop-arm cameras on school buses. I would like to begin our testimony by first highlighting some of the safety aspects of riding in school buses as we feel it's important for us to share our statistics with you as you consider any legislation concerning school transportation.

Pennsylvania school districts transport over 1.5 million school students daily at public expense. This includes public, private, charter, and parochial school students in grades K-12. Over 31,000 registered school buses transport these students more than 404 million miles annually. More importantly is the fact that Pennsylvania has not experienced a student fatality on a school bus since 1993. (As reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Bureau of Driver Licensing, Special Driver Programs.)

As I stated previously, more than 85% of school districts use independent school bus contractors to transport their students meaning an overwhelming majority of school buses on the road in Pennsylvania are privately owned and operated by school bus contractors.

These statistics are a true testament to the commitment of school bus operators and the highly skilled drivers they employ. For the past 35 years, the Pennsylvania School Bus Association has been actively involved with PennDOT reviewing school bus, school vehicle and school bus driver qualification regulations. Our partnership with the Department ensures that students are transported in the safest vehicles on a daily basis.

The PSBA recognizes that school bus drivers have a duty to direct 100% of their attention to the safe operation of the school bus and the safety of their passengers. We share the concerns of parents and others regarding increased occurrences of motorists who are ignoring the existing stop arms and flashing lights that are activated when children are entering and exiting a school bus.

Today, we are here to provide our comments on House Bill 1249, PN 1642, sponsored by Representative Seth Grove, which would allow school districts to contract with a vendor for the installation of cameras on school bus stop-arms. First, let me take this opportunity to thank Representative Grove and his staff for meeting with us and seeking our input and insights on this issue.

During our discussions, PSBA raised two concerns regarding the operational aspects of stop-arm cameras. It is our understanding, that Representative Grove intends to address these issues through the amendatory process.

1. Since the cameras being placed on the buses are the result of an agreement between the school district and the camera vendor, we believe that school bus contractors should not be responsible for any costs related to the installation, maintenance, repair or removal of the stop arm cameras. We believe this responsibility lies between the parties who are contracting to place the cameras on the buses – the school district and camera vendor.
2. School bus contractors have a contractual responsibility to insure that their buses are on the road each and every day. With the inclusion of stop-arm cameras on a school bus, the PSBA has asked that school bus operators not be required to take a bus “out of service” due to a malfunctioning camera. Requiring a contractor to park a bus until a camera could be repaired would create hardships for many, if not most, contractors.

Once again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony to you today. I am happy to take any questions that you may have at this time.