



## **TESTIMONY**

**House Education Committee**

**Public Hearings on Safely Reopening School**

**Tuesday, August 4, 2020 & Wednesday, August 5, 2020**

**Room 140, Main Capitol**

**Harrisburg, PA**



Good Morning Chairmen Sonney and Roebuck,

On behalf of the Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA), I would like to thank the members of the House Education Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony for these hearings on Safely Reopening Schools.

The Pennsylvania School Bus Association was founded in 1980 and consists of over 300 school bus contractors and industry partners who have come together to be a strong voice for school bus safety and the school bus contracting industry. Our mission is to provide programs, education, and services to promote and foster the highest degree of safety in the transportation of school children.

When it comes to contracting for school bus transportation, Pennsylvania is one of the leaders with over 80% of school districts choosing private school bus contractors to transport their students. We are proud that school buses are considered the safest mode of transportation for our students. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, students are 70 times more likely to get to school safely if they take a school bus instead of traveling by car, bike or foot. According to the American School Bus Council, school buses keep over 17 million cars off the road each year.

Over 1.5 million Pennsylvania students are transported daily on school buses and school vehicles.<sup>1</sup> An overwhelming number of Pennsylvania families depend on school transportation each and every day. This includes the parents and guardians of over 300,000 special needs students (exceptional learners) who attend our schools and specialized programs throughout the state.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past couple of months, school districts have focused on the development of their plans to reopen school. Because school bus transportation is interconnected to almost all facets of school district operations, we have encouraged school bus contractors to become involved in the planning process. PSBA is pleased that many school districts are taking advantage of the expertise their school transportation providers can offer during this time.

School bus contractors are assisting their districts as they consider schedule and routing alternatives. As reopening plans are finalized and the General Assembly considers legislation addressing issues related to the reopening of school, PSBA asks that you include the concerns and needs of the school transportation community.

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<sup>1</sup> [Pennsylvania School Bus Statistics](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PDE - Special Education Enrollments \(2018 – 2019\)](#)



PSBA is actively seeking feedback from school bus contractors on the impact of school district reopening plans on their operations. Many school districts are moving to a shortened school week, for example holding in-person instruction four days a week and then closing the school buildings for one day for a thorough cleaning of the buildings. While we understand the premise behind these schedule changes, contractors are concerned with the potential devastating results a shortened work week could have on their ability to retain school bus drivers in a workforce already suffering a severe shortage. Providing contractors with the ability to keep drivers paid for those days of closure would ensure that they remain on the job and ready for when we return to a normal schedule.

In addition, a shortened week for the school district does not diminish the expenses incurred by school bus contractors. These expenses include, but are not limited to, the financing costs for maintaining an updated fleet of vehicles (something that is often required by school district contacts); repair and maintenance of buses, including the additional costs for products, equipment and driver training needed during the pandemic; and ongoing efforts to recruit and train new drivers.

The General Assembly recently approved twelve months of full funding for pupil transportation for which we are greatly appreciative. We believe that it is essential to maintain funding for contractors so they can continue to pay drivers and maintain their operations during any period a school district is closed – whether one day a week or for a period of months.

No matter the situation, we know we will get through this unprecedented period with schools returning to a normal schedule at some point hopefully this school year. Without the continued flow of funding for school bus contractors through monies already budgeted, the Commonwealth faces the real possibility that many contractors will be unable to retain their drivers and maintain their businesses. This may unfortunately result in the loss of the safest, most reliable method of transporting our most precious cargo, our school children, when school resumes to normal.

On behalf of school bus contractors across the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania School Bus Association looks forward to working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and your committee as we move toward the fall and schools reopening.

We thank you for allowing us this opportunity to submit testimony to the committee for these hearings. If the committee has any additional questions, please contact Mike Berk, PSBA Executive Director at (717) 975-1951 or [mberk@paschoolbus.org](mailto:mberk@paschoolbus.org).