



Written testimony from the Pennsylvania School Bus Association to the Pennsylvania House Commerce Committee on Workforce Shortages in the Commonwealth

August 30, 2021

Dear Chairman Roae,

On behalf of the Pennsylvania School Bus Association, we want to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Pennsylvania House Commerce Committee regarding workforce shortages currently plaguing the Commonwealth. The Pennsylvania School Bus Association was founded in 1980 and consists of over 300 school transportation contractors and industry partners who have come together to be a strong voice for school transportation safety and the school transportation contracting industry.

The school bus industry as a whole is no stranger to workforce shortages, as it has been dealing with a school bus driver shortage for a number of years prior to COVID-19, though the pandemic has only exacerbated it. The shortage has reached crisis levels despite the best efforts of our school bus contractors to recruit and retain qualified drivers. Only recently, Pittsburgh Public School District has decided to delay the start of their school year by two weeks due to a lack of school bus drivers. Further, school districts have considered moving the start and end times for different schools to allow time for school bus drivers to make multiple runs to pick up students and ensure that they are able to get to school safely. If the driver shortage is not remedied in short order, the workload on each individual driver is sure to continue to grow, eventually forcing more drivers out of the industry. We fear that actions similar to those taken in Pittsburgh will become more and more common, which will have far reaching implications for our children's education.

There are a number of reasons for the school bus driver shortage. For one, school bus drivers are equally qualified to drive a school bus and to drive a semi-truck, which can present a number of different issues. Many individuals may not realize all of the requirements inherent in driving a school bus, such as the requirement to have an annual physical, pass multiple knowledge tests, and even to pass a skills test that requires the individual to be able to identify and inspect multiple mechanical components of a school bus, such as the steering linkage, various engine compartment belts, and even brake slack adjusters and push rods. This requirement is not necessary for the safe and effective transportation of students, as the vast majority of school bus drivers only transport children within 45 minutes of their respective bus garage. In the event a school bus breaks down, the driver would not leave the bus to attempt to repair the issue and leave the students unattended, rather a mechanic or a new bus would be dispatched to that location.

In some circumstances, the annual physical itself can prove costly. There are situations where the driver is forced to undergo additional testing deemed unnecessary by their primary care physician because of various regulatory requirements. Depending on the driver and their health insurance, not all portions of this additional testing may be covered by insurance, potentially leaving the driver with thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses. For example, our members most often come to us with concerns about their drivers needing a cardiac waiver, which can

include stress tests. There have been instances where the driver's doctor has indicated that an annual stress test is not medically required, but the driver still needs to complete the test in order to maintain their school bus endorsement on their Commercial Driver's License. This test may not be covered annually by the individual's insurance plan, leaving the driver or their employer to cover the cost for this medically-unnecessary procedure.

It is important to note that safety is our highest priority. We appreciate any efforts taken and any measures put in place that would help alleviate the school bus driver shortage, it absolutely cannot be at the expense of the safety of our drivers, the general motoring public, and, most importantly, our children. Our primary mission is the safe and reliable transportation of the Commonwealth's most precious cargo—our children. With swift and effective action, we can remedy the situation and ensure that we are able to continue to accomplish our mission well into the foreseeable future.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide this written testimony to you as you investigate workforce shortages in the Commonwealth, and would appreciate the opportunity to speak further with you and the House Commerce Committee on this issue in the future.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ryan Dellinger, Executive Director, by phone at (717) 975-1951 ext. 500 or by email at rdellinger@paschoolbus.org. Alternatively, you can also contact Kim Sokoloski, Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, by phone at (717) 237-4861 or by email at kimberly.sokoloski@bipc.com.

Respectfully,



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cc: Representative John T. Galloway, Minority Chair
Members of the Pennsylvania House Commerce Committee