



**Written Testimony from the Pennsylvania School Bus Association to the Pennsylvania
Labor and Industry Committee on Unemployment Compensation
Concerns in the Commonwealth**

August 30, 2021

Dear Chairman Cox,

On behalf of the Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA), we want to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Pennsylvania House Labor & Industry Committee regarding issues facing the Commonwealth's unemployment compensation system.

The PSBA 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. One of the most significant parts of the school transportation industry that is often overlooked is the role that unemployment compensation plays in retaining school bus drivers.

As you are likely aware, much of the United States is facing a school bus driver shortage, forcing school districts and pupil transportation contractors to come up with creative solutions to both recruit new school bus drivers and ensure that routes can be covered as recruitment efforts continue. The shortage itself is the result of a number of different factors, not the least of which is the fact that school bus drivers are equally qualified to drive a school bus and a semi-truck. However, for the purposes of this hearing, we must turn our attention to the summer.

In years past, school bus drivers were permitted to file for unemployment compensation during the summer months when work was scarce, and, most importantly, were exempt from work-search requirements. This exemption was, and is, absolutely critical to the welfare of the school bus industry, as forcing school bus drivers to seek additional work over the summer is sure to result in many individuals choosing to leave the profession in favor of other work, or to retire altogether.

Further, ensuring that school bus drivers are able to consistently and reliably collect their unemployment compensation is crucial, else drivers be forced to seek other work during the summer, leading to a similar end result. We have many drivers who have not received any unemployment payments since school ended nearly three months ago, which has proven to be a great strain on their families. Our school bus drivers have been considered essential workers throughout the COVID-19 shutdowns, and ensuring that they are able to receive the unemployment compensation that they rely on so that they are able to continue transporting our students to and from school safely is of utmost importance.

We understand that we are not the only industry struggling with unemployment compensation issues, however, driving people out of the school bus industry has far reaching implications for students and businesses across the Commonwealth. The majority of our school bus contractor members are small, family-owned businesses who will simply be unable to survive the lack of drivers, and be forced to close. Further, students will likely be forced to either walk

farther to school, endure longer rides on the bus, or parents will be made to drive their children to and from school each day. Riding on a school bus is approximately 70 times safer than riding in a car, and we want to be sure that we are able to continue to keep students safe.

Further, allowing the school bus driver shortage to continue for much longer will begin to severely impact the ability of our children to get to and from school reliably. Pittsburgh Public Schools recently elected to delay the start of their 2021-22 school year by two weeks due to the lack of school bus drivers, and this is a trend that we will likely see become increasingly common as time goes on. The primary mission of the school bus industry is to safely and reliably transport children to and from school safely, however, with such a severe shortage of drivers, it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide this written testimony to you as you investigate unemployment compensation issues in the Commonwealth, and would appreciate the opportunity to speak further with you and the House Labor and Industry 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 Gerald J. Mullery, Minority Chair
Members of the Pennsylvania House Labor and Industry Committee