



Testimony of

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Before the

House Committee on Judiciary
HB 3036

— On —

AN ACT Related to School Bus Safety

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An Independent Federal Agency

Good morning, Chair Kropf and Members of the Judiciary Committee.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) appreciates this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 3036.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents it investigates and makes safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety, such as our work on pedestrian safety. The recommendations that arise from our investigations and safety studies are the NTSB’s most important tool for saving lives and preventing injury.

School bus travel is one of the safest forms of transportation in the United States. Every day, nearly 600,000 buses carry more than 25 million students to and from school and activities. Children are safer traveling in school buses than in any other vehicle because of their robust structural design and unique operating environment.¹ However, these protections are limited within the walls of the bus; and, even so, the NTSB has recommended that states require that all new large school buses be equipped with passenger lap/shoulder belts for all passenger seating positions.² Unfortunately, outside the vehicle, school children remain unprotected and vulnerable in any collision with a vehicle. Our investigations focus on student transportation policies, bus route planning, and safety issues related to school bus loading and unloading on high-speed roadways.

The NTSB has a history of investigating and making recommendations on crashes involving the school bus transportation system. However, we continue to investigate these crashes that result in preventable fatalities and injuries. On October 30, 2018, the NTSB investigated a crash in Rochester, Indiana, where a pickup truck failed to stop for a school bus, striking four children.³ The school bus was waiting with its lights flashing and stop arm extended for the students to cross the roadway and board the bus. However, a pickup truck drove past those signals and struck the children at over 55 mph. A 9-year-old girl and her 6-year-old twin brothers died from their injuries and an 11-year-old boy, who was with them, sustained serious blunt-force trauma injuries. This was just one among three crashes in October 2018 involving children crossing a roadway to board their school buses. On October 25, in Hartsfield, Georgia, two boys never made it to school that morning. The 10-year-old and 7-year-old brothers started to cross the road to catch their bus when they were struck by a car who failed to yield for their school bus. State officials stated that the 10-year-old died from his injuries trying to protect his 7-year-old brother, who sustained serious injuries. Only six days later in Baldwin, Mississippi, a 9-year-old boy was crossing the road to board his elementary school bus when a pickup truck driver did not heed the bus’s extended stop arm and flashing lights and struck and killed the child.

¹ See the [NHTSA road safety webpage on school bus safety](#), accessed July 10, 2019.

² <https://data.ntsb.gov/carol-main-public/sr-details/H-18-010>

³ [HWY19MH003.aspx \(ntsb.gov\)](#)

School Transportation-Related Crashes and Illegal Passings

In all 50 states, it is illegal to pass a school bus that is stopped to load or unload passengers with its red lights flashing and stop arm extended. These laws apply to traffic approaching from either direction on undivided highways. Unfortunately, these laws are often not enough of a deterrent to prevent this dangerous driving behavior, and it is estimated that more than 41 million vehicles illegally passed school buses in a 180-day school year.⁴

Stop Arm Cameras

Several states and local communities have combined education and enforcement efforts to reduce illegal passing of school buses with high-visibility enforcement campaigns. Targeting illegal bus passing can be effective in raising awareness; however, they are expensive to conduct and limited in scope to a specific area and time. Alternatively, some school districts are trying an automated approach by installing cameras on school bus stop arms to record images of vehicles (and/or drivers) illegally passing the school bus when it is stopped to load or unload students. Evidence suggests that use of stop arm cameras can reduce the incidences of illegal passings and can reduce violations by almost 40 percent (Verra Mobility 2016).⁵ Montgomery County, Maryland, which operates a school bus stop arm camera program, saw a decrease of citations per bus/per day from 1.06 to .42 from the 2016 school year to the 2019 school year.

Additionally, the images from the cameras can be used to enforce stop arm violations, and they can also provide additional information for assessing the safety of school bus routes and stops, including identifying what areas and routes experience more illegal passing. The NTSB concluded that the use of stop arm cameras could deter drivers from illegally passing stopped school buses and recommended to the States that do not currently have laws permitting the use of stop arm cameras on school buses for enforcement purposes to enact legislation to permit stop arm cameras.⁶

Although school buses are an extremely safe mode of transportation, more needs to be done to ensure that our most vulnerable road users—children outside the vehicle—arrive at school and home again safely. Thank you for this opportunity to provide a statement on our recommendations for improving school transportation safety. We would be happy to provide additional information in response to any questions that the committee might have.

⁴ [2022 NASDPTS Illegal Passing Results Press Release 9-2022 FINAL.pdf](#)

⁵ The firm Verra Mobility (formerly American Traffic Solutions) studied the citations resulting from 290 school bus safety cameras in 15 programs in Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, and Texas during the 2013–2014 school year.

⁶ The 28 US states that do not have such laws are as follows: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin. The District of Columbia also does not have such a law.