

**Testimony, House T&I Committee**

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Good afternoon, Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chair Norton, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the Subcommittee.

I'm here representing the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission and Governor Murphy, and we're grateful for the opportunity to speak on such an important topic.

Last year, a school bus crash in Mount Olive, New Jersey, tragically took the lives of East Brook Middle School fifth-grader Miranda Vargas, and Paramus Social Studies teacher Jennifer Williamson, and injured dozens of children.

This crash broke our hearts – and caused us to take a hard look at how we keep our kids safe.

***New Jersey's History of School Bus Safety***

New Jersey is second to none in ensuring that children who ride our school buses are safe.

Every one of our 23,000 school buses is inspected at least twice a year, with a review of driver qualifications as well as vehicle safety. Our Governor's School Bus Safety Task Force conducts an additional 100 unannounced inspections.

Unannounced inspections have been particularly crucial to help identify private operators who have unlicensed or otherwise unqualified drivers operating their school buses.

We started requiring lap belts on all school buses in 1992, and we remain one of only seven states that require belts on all school buses.

In 1996, we started requiring every bus to be equipped with a crossing arm, that swings out and prevents children from passing directly in front of the bus. This was modeled after Betsy's Law in Washington State.

In 2017, with the passing of Abigail's Law, all New Jersey school buses were required to have sensors in front and in back to detect an object or small child below the field of view.

Every work night, the Motor Vehicle Commission generates a report of any school bus driver whose license has been suspended and transmits that report directly to the New Jersey Department of Education for action.

But after the devastating loss of beloved teacher Jennifer Williamson and 10-year-old Miranda, we resolved to do even more in New Jersey.

### **New Measures**

In the first two years of his administration, Governor Murphy signed eight laws aimed at improving the safety of school buses, drivers, and supervisors. These laws now require the following:

1. All newly-purchased school buses must have 3-point belts.
2. In the past, school bus drivers who accumulated 12 or more points were scheduled for suspension. Under recently enacted legislation, they are now scheduled for suspension if they receive 3 or more moving violations in 3 years or 6 or more points, and they must complete a defensive driving course before being restored.
3. Local boards of education, or the bus contractor that provides pupil transportation services for a local board of education, are notified by the NJDOE of suspensions within one working day and must confirm within one business day that the suspended driver is no longer operating a school bus.
4. In addition to the Commercial Driver License requirement for medical certification from a federal medical examiner every two years, school bus drivers age 70-74 must provide evidence of an annual medical exam, and drivers age 75 and over must have an exam every six months.
5. The State will conduct a study of school bus passenger safety.
6. And finally, at the local level, school bus drivers and school bus aides must now complete trainings biannually and school district transportation supervisors must complete an approved certification program at an institution of higher education.

### **Conclusion**

In some respects, we are fortunate that our Governor, Education Commissioner, state legislators, and members of Congress have all pulled together to enact measures to make our kids safer.

But it hasn't escaped anyone's notice that too many laws have names. **Betsy. Abigail. Miranda.**

Too many tragedies. Too much loss.

If I could convey any message to our sister states, and to you, members of this Committee, it would be this: Don't wait for a child to die to take action; do it now.

I welcome your questions.