



Testimony of

National Transportation Safety Board

Before the

House Committee on Education

HB 4147

— On —

AN ACT Relating to School Bus Safety

—

Washington, DC • February 12, 2024



An Independent Federal Agency

Good afternoon, Chair Neron and Members of the Committee on Education. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) appreciates this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4147.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in the other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

School bus travel is one of the safest forms of transportation in the United States. Every day, nearly 500,000 buses carry more than 21 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 40 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 Baldwyn, 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 fatally struck the child. The NTSB is currently investigating a crash in Wisconsin where a pickup truck swerved to avoid a stopped

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 bus that had lights and stop arm activated, side-swiped the rear of the bus and fatally struck a 13-year-old student pedestrian.⁴

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 roadways and highways. Unfortunately, these laws are often not enough to prevent this dangerous driving behavior, and it is estimated that more than 43.5 million vehicles illegally passed school buses in a 180-day school year.⁵

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).⁶ 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.⁷

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 [HWY23FH012.aspx \(ntsb.gov\)](https://www.nts.gov/hwy23FH012.aspx)

⁵ [PressRelease-2023IllegalPassingSurvey \(nasdpts.org\)](https://www.nasdpts.org/PressRelease-2023IllegalPassingSurvey)

⁶ 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.

⁷ The 28 US states that do not have such laws are as follows: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, , 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.