

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1081

AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF A GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM ON A

Title: SCHOOL BUS AND THE SHORTAGE OF SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS.

Vote Date: 3/10/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/27/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Connecticut is currently facing a shortage of school bus drivers, an issue which has had adverse effects on students and their families. Without a sufficient number of drivers to bus students to and from school, routes may be cancelled leaving the responsibility to fall onto parents; or routes may become longer causing tardiness to become frequent. As a result, student learning has been disrupted, parents who rely on busing have been inconvenienced, and active bus drivers have been overworked. The bill would alleviate some of these adverse impacts. Firstly, it would allow for the use of GPS technology in school buses, enabling drivers to navigate new routes with ease. It would also require the DMV to forgo a portion of the CDL test for candidates intending to drive school buses upon the candidates' own request, as the skill is not needed to perform the duties of a bus driver.

PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE

Substitute language has altered this requirement, which was previously extended to any candidate intending to become a school bus driver. Additionally, the bill further addresses challenges brought on by the driver shortage by giving priority in terms of scheduling road tests to these candidates, calling for a study to look into other possible legislative solutions, and allowing advertisements to be placed on buses.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Jean Cronin, Executive Director, COSTA:

Offering strong support on behalf of COSTA, Cronin appreciates section 1 and its allowance for GPS utilization on school buses. These devices will enable substitute drivers to navigate bus routes more easily, which is especially important in these times with major driver shortages. Cronin also highlights the importance of section 2, and its requirement for DMV Commissioner to prioritize road testing for school bus operation, as it is critical to get drivers on the road as soon as possible. Next, Cronin raises concerns about section 3, which would waive an engine compartment component of the CDL test for applicants seeking endorsement to operate a school bus. While this component is not utilized by school bus drivers, it is necessary to enable them to drive across state lines should they need to. Finally, Cronin states her support for the section 4 study which outlines policy and initiative recommendations in regard to the school bus driver shortage.

Denise Drummond, Legislative Policy Analyst, CWCSEO:

Extends support. Connecticut is facing a school bus driver shortage, a problem which can have detrimental consequences. Districts have been forced to adapt and alter bus routes, sometimes resulting in tardiness for students which may in turn result in poor academic performance and behavioral changes. It may also inconvenience parents who rely on school buses as the primary mode of transportation when bus cancelations occur.

Christopher Melillo, Superintendent, Newtown Public Schools:

Expresses support for the bill, bidding that any support that can be offered in respect to the school bus driver shortage is immensely appreciated. Despite proactive attempts to recruit drivers, Newtown Public Schools have been unable to hire enough to provide efficient transportation. Bus routes have become longer, which often results in late arrivals for students and therefore disrupted learning. It also creates inequities between students who are reliant on the bus and students whose parents are able to provide their own transportation. Further stress is placed on the budget, as overages in the transportation budget offset the funds available for addressing other needs. Supporting this bill would aid in providing the necessary resources to support the academic, social, and mental needs of students.

Mason Thrall, Director of Operations, CREC:

Thrall expresses strong support for the permitted use of GPS navigation systems in school buses, explaining that when substitute drivers must cover a route, they often are unfamiliar with the area. Without a GPS, drivers must resort to paper directions or even ask students to help them navigate. A hands-free navigation system would enable drivers to pay better attention to the road and benefit the safety of the students. Additionally, with the current bus driver shortage, the drivers that are available must cover multiple routes, which means some routes will run late. The bill would also allow advertisements for bus drivers to be placed on school buses, which if successful, may relieve some of the burden brought on by said shortage. Finally, Thrall explains that the bill's waiving of the engine compartment portion of the CDL is logical in that this is a skill unutilized by bus drivers once they pass the CDL and better left to professionally trained mechanics.

Timothy Van Tassel, Ed.D., Superintendent, Suffield Public Schools:

Van Tassel offers his strong support, specifically in reference to the prioritization of scheduling bus driver road tests and acknowledgement of the need for policies and initiatives to alleviate the national bus driver shortage. The driver shortage has created a multitude of problems; many buses are at maximum capacity, routes are longer, and it has become increasingly

difficult to find drivers for after school activities. Additionally, there are now no backup drivers, therefore when a driver is absent the route must be divided or cancelled altogether. This places a burden on parents, who are left to provide transportation last minute. It is important that these problems are addressed, and this bill provides a tangible way to do so.

Deborra Zukowski, Chair, Newtown Board of Education:

Offers support on behalf of the Newtown Board of Education, citing concerns the Newtown school systems have had maintain bus drivers. The use of a 2-tier bus system in Newtown has pronounced the impacts of the driver shortage, and the burden hits some families harder than others. Allowance of GPS technology would enable substitute drivers to more comfortably take on other routes, benefitting those who are more often affected by driver absences. The shortage also impacts transportation for extracurriculars and special education. Beyond Newtown, this shortage impacts all Connecticut districts, and Zukowski encourages anything that can be done to help alleviate the problem.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Reported by: Lindsay de Brito

Date: 3/24/2023