



SCOTT L. JOHNSON

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 33RD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Office: (608) 267-9133
Toll-Free: (888) 529-0033
Fax: (608) 282-3633
Rep.Johnson@legis.wisconsin.gov

P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708-8952

ASSEMBLY 614

TESTIMONY OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT JOHNSON

Chairperson VanderMeer and members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill 614.

According to a 2023 survey done by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, 286 of the 977 Wisconsin school bus drivers reported an illegal passing at least once along their routes in a single day. Extrapolated out, the Wisconsin School Bus Association estimates the annual total is approximately 627,000 illegal passes each school year.

This bill modifies the driver education and testing requirements by adding a school bus safety component to driver's licensing and renewal.

The focus of this bill is to increase the driver's license applicant's awareness of the hazards posed by motor vehicles to school buses and passengers loading onto or unloading from school buses and of the statutes that require motorists to stop when a school bus is displaying flashing red lights.

Under current law, most operator's licenses issued by the Department of Transportation must be renewed every eight years. In general, an applicant for renewal of an operator's license must pass an eyesight test and have his or her photograph taken.

Under this bill, an applicant for renewal must also complete a verbal school bus safety examination that includes a test of the applicant's awareness of the hazards posed by motor vehicles and the requirements to stop when a school bus is displaying flashing red lights.

The applicant's performance on the examination will not affect whether or not the applicant's license is renewed, and, to the extent feasible, DOT must ensure that the examination does not extend the time necessary to complete the renewal process.

Currently, applicants for an initial operator's license must generally complete a knowledge test and driving skills test. The bill specifies that the knowledge test administered to these applicants must include material testing the applicant's knowledge of the hazards posed by motor vehicles and the requirements to stop when a school bus is displaying flashing red lights.

Also under the bill, driver education courses offered by school districts, technical colleges, and licensed private driver schools must provide instruction in on the hazards posed by motor vehicles and the requirements to stop when a school bus is displaying flashing red lights.

Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.



February 6th, 2024

Representative VanderMeer, Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 614

Relating to: driver education and testing related to school bus safety.

Thank you, Chairwoman VanderMeer and other members of the committee, for hearing my testimony on Assembly Bill 614 today. This session, I have focused on addressing the safety concerns our school bus drivers have in relation to the uptick in illegal passings. According to the Wisconsin School Bus Association, the number of illegal passes of a school bus are climbing; between 2019 and 2022, reported incidents increased from 25% to 40%. According to School Transportation News, 45% of drivers who illegally pass a school bus may not know the laws protecting a stopped bus. This lack of awareness jeopardizes the safety of everyone in and around the school bus.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) has tried to address this by including information about school bus safety in their educational manual. However, this information is not officially mandated to be taught or covered on the exam for future drivers. This gap in the system does not ensure that drivers understand best practices regarding school buses, which puts children and other drivers at risk. There is also no guarantee drivers will retain this important information years into the future.

AB 614 requires that drivers, when renewing their license every 8 years, be given a verbal school bus safety question to answer as part of the renewal process. This question will not impact whether an individual's license is renewed; the intent is to refresh the individual's understanding of school bus safety laws. This will help ensure drivers are up-to-date on Wisconsin's laws, and penalties when it comes to encountering a school bus.

Our drivers need to know the rules of road. We put trust in our school buses to transport our kids, but safety is a two-way street. Thank you, and I will take any questions at this time.

Respectfully,

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District
Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov



WISCONSIN SCHOOL BUS ASSOCIATION

P: 608.514.5470 * E: cherie@wi-sba.org * www.wi-sba.org

Testimony of the Wisconsin School Bus Association
IN SUPPORT OF AB614
Before the Assembly Committee on Transportation
February 6, 2024

Greetings Chair VanderMeer and members of the Committee. This testimony in support of AB614, is provided by Cherie Hime, Executive Director for the Wisconsin School Bus Association (WSBA). The Association represents more than 200 members including commercial operators, school districts, and suppliers to the school bus industry.

The Association's objective is to promote and encourage safety in school bus transportation in Wisconsin. Each year, schoolchildren are killed or seriously injured outside the school bus by impatient and irresponsible drivers who fail to yield to stopped school buses.

In 2023, the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services' (NASDPTS) annual illegal passing survey reported 66% of school bus drivers experienced vehicles illegally passing their stopped school bus. In Wisconsin, **30%** of participating school bus drivers witnessed a vehicle illegally passing their bus in **one day**. Adjusting for 100% of Wisconsin licensed school bus drivers, the **annual school year impact is at least 627,000 illegal passings in a 180-day school year**.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) created a "Guide to Reducing the Illegal Passing of School Buses" utilizing survey data reported in 1995. The report noted the goal to reduce stop-arm violations must be two-pronged involving Education/Awareness and Enforcement. This bill is focused on education. Surprisingly there is nothing in Wisconsin's statutes requiring the instruction and hazards of driving around a school bus even though the 'yellow' school bus has been used since 1939.

Lack of education creates confusion and noncompliance with the law, risking children's lives every day.

Every student seeking to obtain a driver's license should be trained on the rules of the road in relation to the school bus. Adding the statutory requirement will ensure each new motorist has been given instructions of the law. Asking a school bus question at license renewal provides another step in education, reminding drivers about the requirement to stop for a school bus with its stop arm out and red lights flashing. These goals seek to change behavior with better educated motorists.

WSBA thanks Representative Johnson and Senator James for their leadership introducing this bill as well as all co-sponsors for supporting changes that will assist with the increasing problem of illegal school bus passing.

Cherie A. Hime
Executive Director