



School Bus Security

"Good morning Chairwoman Baker, Chairman Solobay, and the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. My name is Selina Pittenger and I am the Executive Director for the Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA). Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on school bus safety and security.

Since the tragedy on September 11, 2001 the school bus industry has spent time and attention on improving security measures. The more recent tragedies in Sandy Hook, Connecticut and in Midland City, Alabama have all stakeholders focused on procedures and training that have been utilized over the last decade.

In Pennsylvania school bus contractors have consulted with school districts and numerous agencies in the communities to develop emergency plans against terrorist and criminal threats. The U. S. Department of Homeland Security and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) have worked tirelessly with the transportation industry to develop awareness and training programs.

Immediately after 9/11 the school bus industry in the United States began focusing on the vulnerability and exposure the school bus is in every community and developed guidelines and recommendations for school districts and contractors to implement. In 2005, the 14th Congress on School Transportation added a new section to the Guidelines and Procedures publication. All congresses have been made up of official representatives from state departments of education, public safety, motor vehicles, and police or other state agencies having state-wide responsibilities for the administration of student transportation; local school district personnel; contract operators; advisors from industry and representatives from other interested professional organizations and groups. This was a brand new section to the comprehensive best practices guidelines that covers all aspects of pupil transportation from equipment standards, operations and special needs transportation.

National and state pupil transportation associations continue to hold educational sessions on security and emergency preparedness. Through the transportation associations, its members received information and access to training programs for drivers, administrators and staff members. Such programs include the TSA First Observer program that trains school bus drivers on how to recognize and report security threats. The School Transportation Security Awareness, or STSA, program was developed by TSA in conjunction with the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, the National Association of Pupil Transportation and the National School Transportation Association to provide much needed security awareness information and training to the school transportation industry. STSA focuses on terrorist and criminal threats to school buses, bus passengers and destination facilities. It is designed to provide school bus drivers, administrators, and staff members with information that will enable them to effectively identify and report perceived security threats, as well as the skills to appropriately react and respond to a security incident should it occur.

In addition to the TSA's School Transportation Security Awareness program, the TSA has now begun performing safety and security audits of school bus contractor facilities. The TSA has completed these audits at motor truck and motor coach operations over the last several years and now has the resources to evaluate school bus contractor operations. The Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA) has asked the TSA to provide a presentation at our annual conference this June to review the details of what an audit entails.

In Pennsylvania there are laws in place that prohibit unauthorized entry onto a school bus. This law has certainly helped in curtailing persons from entering a school bus to do harm to a child or the school bus driver. However, this law will not protect against the person who has lost all sense of reason and does not care about any type of criminal consequences. School bus drivers are trained in procedures to follow in such a situation, such as notifying authorities and other emergency evacuation procedures.

Technologies are certainly providing methods to be able to capture live video feeds, but the equipment is expensive. In Pennsylvania the use of such equipment, on a school bus, could be deemed a violation of the Commonwealth's wiretap law. We are currently seeking clarification on this, and possibly a statutory remedy to allow the use of audio equipment.

The Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA) represents private companies and individuals who provide pupil transportation services to the school districts in Pennsylvania. Members from across the state represent large, small and special needs school transportation providers. More than 85 percent of the 500 school districts utilize private contractors. The PSBA works to promote and foster the highest degree of safety in the transportation of school children, and to strengthen the quality of this transportation through professional management. PSBA works with many Pennsylvania organizations and government agencies to advance our mission and accomplish the goals of the membership.

A few School Bus Statistics

- There are 44,882 licensed school bus drivers in Pennsylvania.
- There are 31,105 registered school buses in Pennsylvania.
- More than 1.5 million students are transported daily on school buses to and from school.
- More than 400 million miles are driven annually by school buses.
- A new school bus driver must receive a minimum of 20 hours of training. Additionally, all school bus drivers must receive a minimum of 10 hours of training every four years.
- All school bus drivers must pass an annual physical, undergo extensive background checks and submit to pre-employment drug testing, and upon employment, be in a random drug and alcohol testing program.