

SUFFOLK TRANSPORTATION SERVICE, INC.

JOHN J. CORRADO
PRESIDENT

May 2, 2013

Dear Senator Fuschillo,

Thank you for your invitation to speak at your hearing concerning school bus safety and the proposed interlock system for NYS school buses.

For the record, my name is John J. Corrado. I am the president of Suffolk Transportation Service, Inc., a family run school bus and transit bus company, located in Bay Shore, NY. We currently operate several hundred school buses, transit and paratransit buses. As a brief history, my grandparents formed Green Bus Lines with several other private transit operators in NYC. My father started his career at Varsity Transit in 1965 as the VP of school bus operations for Queens. Varsity Transit was owned by Green Bus Lines. In 1970 my father purchased Suffolk Transportation. I started my career as a CPA in NYC and began working for my father in 1988. In 1996 my father retired and promoted me to President of the company. Currently, I sit on the boards of the Transit Bus and School Bus Associations. I also sit on the board of a local university and several not-for-profit organizations. Recently, I joined the board of a large regional bank.

NYS runs a very large school bus transportation system. There are approximately 50,000 vehicles moving 2.5mm children over 250mm miles of road. The approximate total cost of this system to the taxpayer is \$3.0 billion per year, of which more than half, on average, is supported by state funding. Currently, NYSDOT has a robust program for vehicle inspections, spending 1 hour inspecting every bus twice a year (2 hrs. of state oversight per vehicle per year). NYS inspectors either pass or fail a bus on this inspection. The pass rate is accumulated and publically published for each operator at the end of the state fiscal year. This inspection almost guarantees that each school bus is safe to transport children, and this system has served to improve the maintenance programs at every carrier in the state (for both the private bus companies and school district that runs their own fleet).

However, there is no state inspection of a carrier's safety practices. In fact, as a bus company or school district in NYS, you are not required to have any creative safety practices or a safety manual. NYSDMV requires that each property maintain a driver file with documentation to support the requirements under Article 19A. This documentation is reviewed for completeness periodically, by DMV inspectors, but it is simply a paper review.

We are here today because our industry has failed the children of New York with several DWI arrests this school year alone. I am not here to compare my company to others. I would also add that most carriers throughout NYS, are putting a good effort forward on safety. But more can be done to protect our children.

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Over the years there has been great advancement in bus safety. NYSDOT vehicle inspections, Busnet, DMV article 19A, drug testing, CDL, the Physical Performance Test have all served to elevate the standards for our industry. Then in 1996, Governor Pataki and the state legislature passed the RFP (proposal law) which for the first time allowed school districts to do a qualitative as well as quantitative review of their bus services through the bid process. The RFP put the power of how tax dollars are spent back in the hands of the tax payer, the district and the state. [As a side note, in our efforts to improve safety, Section 305 of the State Education Law should limit the use of the low bid to contracts that are under \$1mm annually.]

I would support any effort to improve school bus safety, however, the interlock system, in my opinion, is not the most effective way to achieve this goal. My concern is that it will only serve to mask other operating safety issues. It is also a major investment that simply leaves too many holes for bad behavior to fall through. There are several simple steps the state can take to reduce the chances of having a school bus driver on the road in an impaired state. Others have spoken or will speak to some of these detailed suggestions (including no take home vans and increased random alcohol testing). However, I would like to propose a more global solution that will serve to improve school bus safety on all levels. In NYS, if you are a public transit provider, you must develop, and file with the state, a System Safety Procedure Plan (SSPP-note 1). The NYS DOT Public Transportation Board outlines what this plan is to cover. The PTSB reviews and approves this plan. Every three years this plan must be updated and resubmitted for approval. The plan is subject to state audit and it is used by the PTSB as part of their independent accident investigation of a public transit accident. Failure to have an approved plan could lead to revocation of the carrier's operating authority. The SSPP is there to protect the riding public, and the state employs engineers to monitor these plans. I would like to suggest that this safety plan model be modified and expanded into the school bus transportation system for both private operators and district run fleets. Most bus companies have a good safety plan and manual. For these companies, it would not be a big effort to adopt the PTSB model. Monitoring would be done by state hired engineers. The cost of this program could be supported by a \$50/year charge for a NYS "Cab Card." Again, this "Cab Card" is a fee collection system that is already in place for transit and charter buses. Non-compliant properties would be given time and guidance on how to improve their operations or risk losing their operating authority. The objective would be to set a state standard for school bus safety with the goal of elevating every carrier's safety levels. Senator, we are here today because you have sensed that something is wrong and that our state school bus system has let you down. Let's work together to remove the uncertainty around the level of safety that our children receive in the state. We put this safety net in place for the public transit rider, and the time is right for us to put this in place for our riding children.

1.(see <https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/operating/osss/ptsb/bus/program-guidelines>)