

January 23, 2015

The Honorable Senator Julia Lynn, Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce
State Capitol, Room 548 South
Topeka, KS 966612

Re: SB 3 Unemployment Benefits For Privately Contracted School Bus Drivers

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee

As a School Bus driver for Durham School Service, Overland Park, Kansas, I am writing to register my support for Senate Bill 3, authored by Senator Faust-Goudeau that would end the disqualification of unemployment benefits for School Bus Drivers in the State of Kansas.

This disqualification was introduced sometime in 1983 as a means of curtailing benefits for those school bus drivers employed by private contractors whose business did not extend during the summer months after the end an academic year. These private contractors were small entities and did offer their drivers a "reasonable assurance" of work at the beginning of the next school year but had no work during the summer months. Those that applied for unemployment prior to 1983 used the benefits to sustain living expenses but were seen to the small private contractor as a support to summer vacation. Some Kansas School Districts provide their own student transportation such as Kansas City Kansas USD 500, some provide only transportation for activities such as Great Bend USD 428. These school bus drivers could be eligible for unemployment benefits based on the current law.

The school bus industry has changed dramatically since 1983 such that the small "Mom and Pop" companies have been absorbed by International Transportation Industries such as Durham School Services, a subsidiary of National Express Group a British multinational public transport company, First Student Transportation, a subsidiary of First Group also a British the leading multinational public transport company. Among the United States school bus transportation companies operating in Kansas include Apple Transportation. These companies operate all year and provide transportation for summer school, YMCA activities, scouting activities as well as other non-school related activities requiring a need for school bus drivers. While all of these types of companies employ part time workers, the need for these businesses is for full time bus drivers. Many of the drivers work thirty to forty hours per week on route driving, shuttle, and field trips.

Bus driving work in the summer for these companies is minimal, but many drivers request and receive the needed work experiencing a major cut in income. Those

drivers who need to work during the summer find that there is only so much work available to them and when their assignments are fulfilled find themselves in a monetary pinch. Some of the drivers who only want to work during the academic year and do not wish to be considered for summer work do not require the assistance of unemployment insurance.

Those school bus drivers who work in the summer typically have reduced wages thus making it difficult to meet financial needs during the summer months. When their assignments are fulfilled, most of these employees experience a layoff thus having no income to provide for families. These school bus drivers are the ones who need the unemployment insurance benefits to get them by until the beginning of the next academic year.

Starting wages at Durham School Services in Overland Park is \$12.25 per hour with the largest group of drivers earning \$13.50 to \$13.75 per hour. When benefits are denied to those who need and want to work, decisions must be made to keep afloat to stretch these wages for the entire year. The average employee will earn \$14,000 to \$20,900 before taxes during the year. It is not too difficult to see how hard it is to pay living expenses on these wages during the school year and how devastating an experience during the summer months in making the decisions to place food on the table, pay rent, health care, utilities, and other payments. It is these employees who need the assistance of unemployment benefits.

A possible cause and effect when an individual anticipates a layoff, is the psychological depression that can occur that may affect the performance of driving a school bus during the academic year. Worry about how to meet the above expenses can weigh heavy on a driver causing them to lose focus on the transportation of our state's children. Another cause and effect of a layoff is that the loss of income will also affect an employee's credit rating thus making it even more difficult to purchase large items such as washers, dryers, refrigerators, and automobiles.

School Bus driving is an honorable profession. Transporting our state's children to and from school and other related activities should carry the same importance as any job in Kansas that does not discriminate and disqualify the workers based on their title such as employees of the auto industry, airline industry, communications industry and so on. School bus drivers are no different in the desire to work honorably just as those in all forms of employment and should have the same due process of using the benefits offered to those same employees.

Members of the Committee, it is my hope that you will repeal this archaic rule of unemployment security and restore to Kansas School Bus drivers a sense of dignity as they perform their work. Restore the importance that our school districts, parents and most importantly our children the need for good student transportation the entire year. The different contract companies that provide student transportation that pay the premiums for unemployment benefits in Kansas will also benefit from repealing the law such that more highly qualified drivers will remain with the company thus limiting the need for costly training and high turnover of employees.

Sincerely

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