

Dear Kansas State Legislators,

Please carefully consider **House Bill 2092 and Senate Bill 137**, which provide for a revision that rectifies the disqualification for school bus drivers who are either laid off from work or have a serious reduction of work hours after each academic year is over. Many school districts across the nation as well as right here in Kansas contract out the transportation needs of their students to private, for-profit corporate entities that provide services to not only the school district but to private schools, other corporations, small businesses, organizations, and private parties and individuals.

Some of these services provided are bar hops, in which adults are taken from bar to bar in various areas both in and outside the state of Kansas. Others include, bachelor and bachelorette parties; special events for corporations and organizations, such as veteran reunions/celebrations; church youth group summer camping sessions as well as spring and fall retreats; shuttling services for businesses and conventions; Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts activities; YMCA activities; interstate movement of assets, shuttling services for sports events and theme parks, etc. Therefore, school bus drivers who work at for-profit corporations that are contracted by school districts happen to provide transportation needs to more than just the school contract.

I work for First Student, an international corporation that serves this nation as well as others and brings in billions of dollars in revenues annually through more than just school transportation contracts. As a school bus driver, I have seen my fellow bus drivers suffer mentally, physically, and emotionally during times we are not offered work and therefore, receive very low paychecks or even no paychecks and struggle to feed, shelter and provide for ourselves and our children.

Furthermore, while our corporation tells the unemployment compensation offices that they have given us "reasonable assurance" of giving us work when school resumes, they do not tell us that or provide us that in writing. Moreover, they truly cannot give us any assurances that each and every one of us will still have their route to drive come the start of school in the fall. Case in point: at the Blue Valley District, we have 20 drivers from Minnesota driving for us since August. They were laid off in Minnesota due to a severe decrease in available routes with the school districts in Minnesota. We desperately need them to drive our buses because our own attrition rate is high and we cannot find local drivers to provide the district's needs. These Minnesota drivers are promised 40 hours pay for 20 hours of work per week. Their hotel and transportation needs are paid for by the company and they each receive a per diem for food expenses.

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Each summer, drivers and monitors who cannot find work become desperate. They are forced to try to obtain work that is not just seasonal and due to that, they are unable to get the time off from their summer work to drive routes when the new school year begins or resort to completely turning to social welfare and remain there. This contributes to the high attrition rate at our location.

Furthermore, our corporation offers the management and supervisors access to real benefits, but drivers and monitors are offered a seriously reduced benefit plan that only takes advantage of us. In contrast, school bus drivers and monitors who are school district employees have access to the same benefits as teachers and other district employees. Moreover, contracted drivers and monitors are paid lower wages than our counterparts who work for school districts. And, district-employed school bus drivers have the option to spread their compensation over the entire year like the school teachers.

Since our corporation provides transportation services to entities other than the school district that it is contracted to serve, it is a full-fledged transportation business. And as employees of such a corporate entity, we are asking to be treated as equals when it cannot provide work for us.

Kansas Statute 44-706, Disqualification of Benefits, paragraph (p), places many student transportation employees who do NOT work directly for school districts on the brink of bankruptcy during school breaks, especially between academic years. The law as it is currently written is an unfair and out-dated provision in unemployment benefits for school bus drivers working in Kansas, especially for those who work for transportation contractor business entities that provide charters and other transport services throughout the year.

Additionally, I've been told that school bus drivers in Missouri can collect unemployment compensation during times that there is no work or reduce hours offered by their employer. At the Blue Valley District lot each summer, almost all of us take a cut in hours (as much as half the number of hours) and many of us have no work at all. I work between 30-40 hours per week during the school year and get only 16 hours per week during the summer as a school bus driver. Moreover, we must compete for whatever summertime work is available with college and high school students as well as teachers, who are off from teaching so they can work during the summer for an additional paycheck.

In the past, school bus drivers often labored in fields and helped with planting and harvesting each summer. Today, there are few (if any) agricultural jobs in the Kansas

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City metropolitan area available for drivers who would seek to become field laborers. The competition for summertime work is very hard and many of us desperately need to be able to receive unemployment benefits to maintain our households between academic years.

During the past twenty years, as the economic climate began to change and cost of living increased, more parents (especially mothers) with school-aged children found driving a school bus compatible with raising children since preschoolers were allowed to accompany the parent on the school bus in the 'ride-along-programs' developed to attract more school bus drivers. I am one of those parents. My fourth child was only days old when I put him in his car seat on my bus. However, a couple years ago, First Student developed a policy that prohibits parents from bringing their child on the school bus until the child is at least one year old and weighs at least 20 pounds.

School bus drivers typically cannot afford daycare; they do not make enough driving the bus to even cover daycare costs, so they are forced to quit and wait a year. When they return, they must start over at the beginning of the seniority list. (All routes and extra work are bid on and awarded due to seniority, it is a tragedy to lose seniority due to the birth of a child.) If this policy had been in effect when I had my fourth child, I would not have been able to drive for several years. My son did not weigh 20 pounds until he was nearly four years old. In fact, he turned nine years old last April and last fall, he only weighed 42 pounds. So, as you can see, much has changed since large business entities have bought up smaller companies and began servicing the transportation needs of school districts.

Furthermore, the attrition rate at our own bus lot for the Blue Valley District 229 contract is very high, this is a safety concern for me as well. Before I became a school bus driver, I had noticed that in four months there were five different drivers providing my children transportation from elementary school. This concerned me so much that I applied and have been driving since. I have been a constant at my elementary school since 2003. While the high attrition rate is certainly not caused solely by lack of ability for drivers to collect unemployment when no work is available, it is a major contribution to the reasons for the high attrition rate. Are the safety and comfort of our state's school-aged children important enough to help retain experienced drivers who know the needs of the minors in their charge while transporting them?

The impact on the Blue Valley School District's children, especially this year, is that many of them see different people driving them to school every few months. Another example is another bus that drives out of the same elementary school as I do. Since 2003, bus #7 has had six or seven 'permanent drivers' (as well as many substitute

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drivers in between new drivers) behind the wheel when it drives through my neighborhood. Of all the buses that drive out of my children's elementary school, I am the only true constant and have been for 8 years. I know each child on my bus by name, who their siblings are, what their dog's name is and I recognize their parents. What does this mean to a child and that child's parents? Security and comfort. Don't Kansans deserve that kind of peace of mind for the children who live in districts that contract out their transportation needs to companies?

I'm humbly asking that you and the other members of the Kansas State Legislature to remove the "private contractor" and "reasonable assurance" clauses in the statute. Please correct this unfair legislation. The new wording benefits not only the families of the drivers and monitors who need to be sheltered and fed, but also helps to maintain quality of care to our state's school children by helping to lower the reasons for the high attrition rate for school bus drivers and monitors who are employed by transportation contractors.

Thank you for your time and consideration of your support to enact **House Bill 2092 or Senate Bill 137**. Please contact me with questions or comments via the following options: 913-239-8222 (home telephone), 913-220-3900 (cell telephone), Lorianne@Koneczny.com (email), or mailing address at 8509 West 144th Place, Overland Park, KS 66223-1362.

Respectfully yours,



Lorianne Fisher Koneczny

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