

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee:

My name is Ray Alvarez I am a school bus monitor and former school bus driver for First Student serving the Olathe, KS school district. I started driving a school bus part time in 2007 to offset a tremendous loss of income as a mortgage professional during the mortgage melt down.

Words can't express how relieved I was to complete the comprehensive training to earn my Class B CDL with a School and Passenger Endorsement. It was easier getting licensed to become a Mortgage Professional and a Licensed Insurance Agent in my mind. I'm thinking Geez Louise I'm just trying to earn a weekly paycheck driving a bunch of kids to school.

Another major challenge for me was passing the CDL Physical, as a double bi-pass heart attack survivor, this was no walk in the woods. Surprised there's no requirement for commissioned mortgage professionals and insurance agents.

Last May I flunked my annual physical and am currently trying to reverse diabetes, hopefully within a year so I can get my CDL re-instated without complete re-training. Frankly, I was pretty devastated with my physical results. Luckily, I was able to change positions to a Monitor and maintain employment. Although I took a substantial cut in pay and hours because of the lower qualifications there was one tremendous upside. Wow!!! I'm eligible to collect UI and have assurance of a stable stream of income if needed. What a tremendous relief this was, never since 2007 as a more qualified professional driver had I been eligible to be considered under the statute that exists.

There's truly something wrong and inequitable about this situation and should be remedied as soon as possible so that highly trained professional drivers will be eligible to draw UI and retained in the school bus industry.

A couple of side notes: it costs more money to pay these drivers what little UI they "might" qualify for then recruiting and training their replacements. I'm pretty sure the industry averages about 20 to 30% base of Veterans employed.

Respectfully,

Ray Alvarez