



February 10, 2020

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2532

Good afternoon. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important topic. My name is Fabian Armendariz and I am the Division Director of Operations for the Wichita Public Schools (USD 259). I am here representing our district to show our support for proposed HB 2532, which creates the infrastructure for financial consequences that will act as a deterrent for illegal passing of school buses. This is a very important issue to me not only because Transportation Services is one of the areas that I support in my current role, but because I was previously the transportation director for our district. Throughout my 7 years in that position, I witnessed firsthand the safety concerns and challenges the illegal passing of buses creates.

As Kansas' largest school district, located in the largest urban area in the state, we see first-hand the impact of this issue. With more streets, many of them 4 lanes, and more vehicles, the sheer volume makes this a great concern for our entire community. Our school buses transport around 17,000 students a day. Every year we conduct a one-day recording of these violations and end up with around 400 violations for the day. When you multiply that number times 173 school days, you have almost 70,000 violations that happen throughout the school year. I am quite positive not every driver reports accurately, so that number greatly undercounts the reality of the issue. The concerning part about this is that any one of those 70,000 reported violations for Wichita alone could turn into tragedy at any point.

You may wonder what we have done as a school district to help address this issue in our community. Over the years, we have worked with our Strategic Communications department to raise awareness via social media. We have also partnered with our local news channels to provide data and released stories that raise awareness on the issue. Additionally, we partner with the Wichita Police Department to provide locations and times our bus drivers report experiencing the largest number of violations. Although those measures help temporarily, they only act as Band-Aid, that once removed continue to show signs of a much bigger problem. After a month or so, we begin to receive reports that violations have again increased and things are back to the way they were prior to those interventions.

In our District, we run 400 buses daily that cover over 2100 daily home to school trips between morning and afternoon. Each one of those trips makes several stops to pick up children. With coverage that extensive, our local police department does not have enough officers they can devote to monitor every one of these stops. This is why the camera system recommended in this bill is ideal. With this system, every single bus stop will be monitored. This will make a huge difference. In my opinion, citizens knowing they will (not can) get a \$250 ticket every time they do not obey the law and stop when a bus stop-arm is engaged will act as the best deterrent.

It is currently incredibly frustrating to our bus drivers. They genuinely care about the safety of our students and often have to make adjustments to their routes because they know vehicles do not stop when the stop-arms are engaged in particular areas. Because of the concerns we have around this issue, in our District, our routes are created so we only make right hand stops on 4-lane streets. This certainly increases cost as our routes are not as efficiently scheduled as they could be, but the safety of our students is our highest priority.

This issue is certainly not unique to Kansas. Bus stop-arm violations have been at the center of every school transportation discussion at every national conference I have attended over the last few years. I am proud that our state had the foresight to put together a committee and tackle this issue head on. Furthermore, this bill puts together the mechanisms for this to happen at the state level without school districts needing to invest additional resources to monitor it. The hope is that through the enactment of this Bill, we will see a consistent reduction in the number of violations that can be sustained in the future to keep our Kansas students safe. Thank you for listening and for the work you do for the betterment of our state.