

April 17, 2020

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
S-221 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Gary Peters
United States Senate
724 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
United States Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Casey
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
531 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators:

As you highlight the efforts of essential frontline workers during this pandemic and seek to provide additional hazard pay for them, I write on behalf of the National School Transportation Association (NSTA) to seek your support for inclusion of school bus drivers in the definition of critical essential workers in your “COVID-19 Heroes Fund” proposal. School bus drivers are performing amidst school closures to deliver necessary nutrition, supplies, and remote learning opportunities to students during the COVID-19 health crisis and once school resumes, will be providing students the safest way to and from school, as they have done for decades.

NSTA is the leading resource for school bus transportation solutions since 1964 – for school bus contract-operators engaged primarily in transporting students to-and-from school and school-related activities. Members range from small family businesses to large corporations operating tens of thousands of buses across multiple states. Private school transportation contractors represent roughly **38 percent** of the 26 million students being transported daily on an estimated 480,000 yellow school buses. Every day, the lives of children are entrusted to certified school transportation professionals who have receive special training and have the experience to ensure the safe transport of students.

In the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), schools are closing across the country, and it is unlikely districts will achieve the normally required 180-day school year. More than half of the states have already announced that schools are closed for the remainder of this school year, and most states have already indicated that mandatory instructional day requirements will be waived in light of current events. Right now, these unanticipated school closings have had a devastating impact on school bus contractors, as well as their employees.

In an effort to maintain drivers and support communities, school bus companies have seized the initiative to deliver food and other supplies to students in need. Across the nation, drivers are delivering breakfast and lunch to students that would normally receive those meals – only if they were at school. For many parents, this means one less thing to worry about – that their children will continue to receive nutritious meals despite school closures.

Therefore, NSTA respectfully requests you to specifically include school bus drivers in the definition of essential workers in the COVID-19 “Heroes Fund” that you have proposed. School bus drivers are risking their health to ensure students still receive proper nutrition at least once a day. School bus drivers are essential frontline workers, and supplemental hazard pay is appropriate at this time. In fact, bus drivers have been identified as essential critical infrastructure workers in the latest version of the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency Advisory Memorandum¹.

Down the road, school bus drivers will also remain on the front lines as they transport students to and from school, and school related activities, once school resumes. While for many states that may not be until the next academic year, for others it may be as soon as that. Student transportation needs to be nimble and adaptable during this period of time, but will be impossible, if we don’t have trained professional drivers, eligible and available to work. Your proposal represents an incentivized recruitment and retention effort that will likely have a positive impact.

Currently, the school bus industry suffers from a shortage of bus drivers, and it may be that drivers will seek other, less risky employment during and after this crisis. The coronavirus pandemic could cause an insufficient number of drivers to provide transportation to students when school resumes. There is already a lack of applicants for driver positions, and depending upon the state, it can take up to 12 weeks for a new driver to be adequately and appropriately trained, tested, and licensed.

School bus drivers maintain a crucial job, as school buses single handedly remain the safest way to transport students – safer than walking, biking, or riding in a parental vehicle or another student’s car. U.S. Department of Transportation statistics indicate that students are 70 times more likely to arrive at school safely when being driven by a school bus, than they would if they were riding in a car.²

The Heroes Fund would greatly assist school bus companies with recruitment and retention efforts. In your COVID-19 “Heroes Fund” Memo³, you mention, “Past usage illustrates precedent for federal funding of critical state, local, and tribal employees performing essential response functions that keep our communities safe in times of disaster.” It is without a doubt that school bus drivers fit that mold. This fund would assist with elevating school bus drivers, which is an already under-recognized profession, for their efforts to put the needs of students first.

NSTA appreciates your consideration of our request, and look forward to working with you and other co-sponsors to provide continuity in student transportation. Please feel free to contact me at 703-684-3200 ext. 700, or via email at cmacysyn@yellowbuses.org if you have further questions on the material I supplied.

Sincerely,



Curt Macysyn
NSTA Executive Director



¹ Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency. “ADVISORY MEMORANDUM ON IDENTIFICATION OF ESSENTIAL CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE WORKERS DURING COVID-19 RESPONSE”. March 28, 2020.

https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA_Guidance_on_the_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workforce_Version_2.0_Updated.pdf.

² Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. “Learn the Facts”.

<http://schoolbusfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SafetyFeatures.pdf>.

³ U.S. Senator Gary Peters. “The COVID-19 ‘Heroes Fund’: Senator Gary Peters’ Proposal for Pandemic Premium Pay to Reward, Retain, & Recruit Essential Workers”. April 7, 2020.

https://www.peters.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Senator_Peters_Heroes_Fund%20.pdf.