

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

Date: 03/29/2010

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Kathryn Matayoshi, Interim Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 2452, SD2, HD1 (HSCR886) RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

Purpose of Bill: If funds are available, requires the Department of Education to provide or subsidize the cost of suitable transportation to and from school for public school students in kindergarten to grade 12 and special education classes, except for those who attend public schools located in the Honolulu departmental district. Effective July 1, 2050. (SB2452 HD1) (\$)

Department's Position: The Department of Education does not have a position on this bill. We wish to point out, however that this bill will require the department to provide student transportation services but limit the extent of those services to what can be provided with the legislative appropriation for student transportation services. This is a significant policy change from the present statute, which provides that the department "may" provide student transportation services. In recent years, the appropriation for student transportation services has been significantly less than the cost of providing those services. The department has made up the deficit by transferring funds from other department programs, and/or by internally allocating a portion of federal impact aid funds to student transportation services. SB 2452 SD 2 HD1 would preclude the department from spending more than what is appropriated for student transportation services.

The current year's appropriation for student transportation services is approximately \$50 million, including the appropriation of revolving funds from the collection of fares, while the expenses of the student

transportation program will be approximately \$70 million. Approximately one-third of the student transportation program cost is for curb-to-curb transportation for students with disabilities. This component of the student transportation program cannot be reduced significantly without violating a federal mandate.

Unless the appropriation of general funds for student transportation services is substantially increased, a matter that appears improbable this year, this bill will result in a significant reduction next year -- close to half -- of the level of transportation services provided to students who are using the regular school buses in the current fiscal year.



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March 29, 2010

Representative Marcus R. Oshiro, Chair
Representative Marilyn B. Lee, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 308
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: SB2452, SD2 HD1 Relating to Transportation of School Children

Dear Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee and Members of the Committee:

The issue of whether or not the school bus is the safest, most efficient, most environmentally friendly way to transport children to and from school is not in doubt. It is.

That there is a need to transport children to and from school is not at issue either. The need clearly exists.

The law, however, now states that the Department of Education *may* provide suitable transportation to and from school and for educational field trips for all children in the public schools.

The law further states that the department has the authority to adopt such policies and etc., as it deems necessary to provide suitable transportation.

Because the law is discretionary, because of that three letter permissive word "m a y," the Department of Education can do away with school bus service whenever it chooses, and it has clearly and unequivocally, set in motion plans to do so. In fact, over the past year, the Board of Education has devoted dozens of policy making hours to the question of whether or not to do away with the school bus service on Oahu and statewide. The Department of Education staff has been tasked with writing many recommendations on the issue. The issue is still up in the air.

The legislature has to make itself understood on what in fact is the policy for our state on this issue. Because the Board of Education and the Department of Education have both clearly indicated that they will sacrifice the safety of the children to save money, and that they are doing it, not because it is good policy, they know that it is bad policy, but because the law says that by the use of the word "may," that they can.

Representative Marcus R. Oshiro, Chair
Representative Marilyn B. Lee, Vice Chair
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I hasten to point out that it only dire circumstance which drives them to these decisions. They didn't want to have the shortest school year in the United States, or in any developed or developing country. They don't want to have one of the shortest school days in the United States or in any developed or developing country. They don't want to have one of the most unsafe, unsuitable transportation systems for our school children the United States, or in any developed or developing country—but they feel that they have no choice, because the money isn't there to adequately operate our public schools safely and well.

And because they feel that they have to do what they are doing, they do it. Even though they know that it s bad policy and that other laws and policies are diametrically opposed to what they are feeling forced to do.

It is incumbent on the Legislature of the State of Hawaii to not pass this buck and to make the policy clear and unambiguous. We will have a school system that works and the department **"shall"** provide suitable transportation to and from school.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

John H. Radcliffe
Vice President

Testimony Before
House Committee on Finance

Monday, March 29, 2010

Submitted by: Lee Gomes

SB2452 SD2 HD1, Relating to Transportation of School Children

Good Afternoon Representatives:

My name is Lee Gomes and I represent Gomes School Bus Service, Ltd. and the Hawaii School Bus Association. I would like to say that I strongly support the proposed amendment to Section 302A-406 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes as noted in SB2452 SD2 HD1.

Having school buses service school aged children is the safest and most suitable transportation that can be provided to our children. School buses have a long-standing record of being the safest vehicles on our nation's highways. Upgrades to the construction of these buses are mandated regularly by the Federal Government to assure school buses maintain their integrity as the safest vehicles on our nations roadways.

Regulations governing the school bus driver are far and beyond those of any other passenger vehicle driver. School bus drivers are required to have special endorsements to their CDL license that is specifically geared for school bus driving. After acquiring their CDL license the applicant must pass a drug-screening test approved by the Federal Department of Transportation, a fingerprinting process, a criminal abstract clearance, driving history clearance, a physical exam, and TB screening clearance before they are allowed to transport our children. These clearances must be repeated on a regularly scheduled basis for the duration of employment. In addition, the DOT as well as the DOE mandates annual and bi-annual driver-training courses for all school bus drivers.

Hawaii's school bus system, consisting of over 800 buses, is a form of mass transit currently servicing the entire State. Each bus eliminates approximately 35 private vehicles traveling our roadways twice daily, whenever school is in session, easing traffic congestion on our already overburdened roads.

School buses are an integral part of the educational system. These buses afford many children their only way of getting to school on a safe and timely basis. Availability of these buses also give students the opportunity to educational experiences outside the classroom as well as participating in many school sponsored sports events.

Our children deserve access to equal educational opportunities without undue transportation hardships. I urge you to pass SB2452 SD2 HD1 for the safety and welfare of the children of Hawaii.

Thank you,

Lee Gomes
Gomes School Bus Service, Ltd.
Hawaii School Bus Association

TO: Rep. Oshiro, Chair
Rep. Lee, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Finance

DATE: Friday, March 26, 2010

FROM: Natalie Iwasa
aka Bicycle Mom
1331 Lunalilo Home Road
Honolulu, HI 96825
808-395-3233

HEARING: 6 p.m., March 29, 2010

SUBJECT: SB 2452, SD2, HD1 - **Comments**

Aloha Representatives,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments regarding this bill and related amendments which would require public school bus transportation for children in kindergarten through high school, except for those in the third district. There is no doubt all children must have a safe and reliable method of getting to and from school.

In 2005, President Bush signed into law a federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, which included a program called Safe Routes to School. This program uses five Es - Evaluation, Engineering, Education, Enforcement and Encouragement - to increase the amount of students who walk and bike to school as well as to make it safer for them to do so.

Hawaii has received nearly \$5 million in federal funding for this program since 2005, and teachers and parents are still just learning about it. As you are looking at requirements to bus students to school, please consider ways this program can supplement bus transportation. For example, it offers options for consolidated drop-off points where kids can meet with others who live near school and can walk or bike together. By dropping off students within a two-mile radius of schools, physical activity can be built into their morning and afternoon routines and will improve their health, prepare them for learning, reduce traffic congestion and our reliance on oil as well as reduce transportation costs.

Why Hawai'i Needs School Bus Service

SB 2452

Testimony Advocating for Parents and Students by:

Ken LeVasseur – 239-5875

By some estimates, as many as fifty percent of our public school families have grandparents providing before and after school care for students. Every reduction of school bus service puts our elders under more stress and this is on top of the pressure Furlough Fridays place on our families. When is something going to blow!

The United States did not develop school bus service into the safest transportation network in the World to save money. School bus service was developed into the safest transportation network in the World to save our children's lives which makes it extremely cost effective. Think about it! This issue is not about convenience; it is not about mass transit needs; it is not about money. This issue is about safety. If money needs to be saved, then work with the contractors. They always want to save money, but the BOE and DOE keep micromanaging and increasing specification, insurance and service requirements to inefficient and unnecessary levels.

Every move the Legislature, BOE and DOE make to reduce school bus service endangers our school children. Have you even studied the safety issues involved in reducing school bus service? Six or so years ago the DOE did study how many kids you could kick off the bus by raising school bus fares. And they did it in dime increments! Raising school bus fares greatly reduces school bus ridership. Raising school bus fares have an extremely minimal role in reducing the cost of school bus service - especially since paying students keep being ruled ineligible for school bus service by the BOE and DOE. Yet the BOE and DOE have never studied the safety issues involved in reducing ridership. Where are our priorities!

The statistics on school bus safety are not refutable by anyone. Riding a school bus to and from school is much safer than any other form of transport. Approximately, 600-800 school children a year are killed during school bus service hours in the US because they were not on school buses, (NRC study, 2002, etc.). Half of those students were in cars driven by high school age siblings. Students being forced onto already overcrowded city busses that do not go directly to schools, exposes these children to unprecedented potential for harm by elements of our society that are kept away from schools and school busses. Remember, sexual predators and pedophiles are not prohibited from riding city busses.

Please do not vote to do anything that makes it easier for the DOE to reduce school bus ridership - especially if it is to save money. There are other ways to save money. How much does your child's life cost? How much does your neighbor's child's life cost? If life is so cheap that we can balance budgets with our children's lives, then why have airbags in cars? Why have stoplights and guardrails on our roads? Think about what you are doing, please!