



February 10, 2021

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2154
House Judiciary Committee

Chairman Patton and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important topic. My name is Lisa Riveros and I am the Director of Transportation for the Wichita Public Schools. USD 259 supports HB 2154, which creates the infrastructure for financial consequences that will act as a deterrent for illegal passing of school buses.

One of Wichita Public School's Strategic Plan's goals is to ensure schools are trusted as safe places. HB 2154 would allow us to extend safety to our bus stops. The illegal passing of school buses creates immense safety concerns for our district's bus riders. We want to do everything in our power to decrease the chances of having such a tragedy in the state of Kansas. My heart goes out to the loved ones of the Vardaman Elementary School Student in Mississippi who was killed getting off of the bus in December, 2020. To the three siblings that were killed getting off of their bus in Rochester, Indiana in October, 2018 and to the countless other children in our country who have had their lives taken too soon because of reckless motorists at their school bus stops.

I see first-hand the impact of illegal passing of school buses. Wichita Public Schools is Kansas' largest school district with an area of nearly 150 square miles. We are located in the largest urban area in the state. Our school buses travel many 4 lane streets and often contend with traffic and illegal passing at our 4,000 bus stops.

In a typical school year, our school buses transport around 16,000 students a day. It is our greatest priority to keep all 16,000 students safe at every bus stop.

Every year we conduct a one-day recording of stop arm violations and normally end up with around 400 violations for the day. When you multiply that number times 173 school days, you have almost 70,000 potential violations that happen throughout the school year in Wichita Public Schools alone. I am quite positive that not every driver reports accurately, so that number greatly undercounts the reality of Wichita's stop arm violations. Any one of those 70,000 reported violations for Wichita alone could turn into tragedy for a child 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 through 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 over 400 buses daily that cover over 2100 daily home to school trips between morning and afternoon. We deploy stop arms more than 8,000 times per day in Wichita. With coverage this extensive, our local police department does not have enough officers that they can devote to monitor every one of these bus stops. This is why the camera system recommended in this bill is ideal. With this system, every single bus stop could be monitored every day. All 16,000 of Wichita's bus riders could have an extra layer of security and safety at their bus stop every day! This will make a huge difference. In my opinion, citizens knowing they will 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.

Motorists not stopping for school bus stop arms is scary for our parents. It is incredibly frustrating to our bus drivers, too. The bus drivers 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 school transportation discussions 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 HB 2154, we will see a consistent reduction in the number of violations and ultimately help keep our children safe. Thank you for listening, for considering the lives of our children, and for the work you do for the betterment of our state.