

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1993

To provide for school bus safety, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 19, 1997

Mr. TRAFICANT introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and in addition to the Committees on Education and the Workforce, and the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To provide for school bus safety, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “School Bus Safety
5 Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act, the following definitions apply:

8 (1) BUS.—The term “bus” means a motor vehi-
9 cle with motive power, except a trailer, designed for
10 carrying more than 10 persons.

1 (2) SCHOOL BUS.—The term “school bus”
 2 means a bus that is used for purposes that include
 3 carrying pupils to and from public or private school
 4 or school-related events on a regular basis.

5 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
 6 the Secretary of Transportation.

7 **SEC. 3. PROFICIENCY STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL BUS**
 8 **DRIVERS.**

9 (a) REQUIREMENT.—Not later than 1 year after the
 10 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall pre-
 11 scribe proficiency standards for school bus drivers who are
 12 required to possess a commercial driver’s license to oper-
 13 ate a school bus.

14 (b) EXEMPTION FOR CERTAIN STATES.—In prescrib-
 15 ing proficiency standards under subsection (a), the Sec-
 16 retary shall provide that a State may, instead of utilizing
 17 such proficiency standards, utilize proficiency standards
 18 established by the State before the date of the prescription
 19 of efficiency standards under subsection (a) if the Sec-
 20 retary determines that the standards of the State establish
 21 proficiency requirements as rigorous as the proficiency re-
 22 quirements established under the standards prescribed
 23 under subsection (a).

24 (c) DEMONSTRATION OF PROFICIENCY.—Upon the
 25 prescription of standards under subsection (a), each school

1 bus driver referred to in subsection (a) shall demonstrate
 2 (at such interval as the Secretary shall prescribe) to the
 3 employer of the driver, the school district, the State licens-
 4 ing agency, or other person or agency responsible for regu-
 5 lating school bus drivers the proficiency of such driver in
 6 operating a school bus in accordance with the proficiency
 7 standards prescribed under subsection (a) or the pro-
 8 ficiency standards established by the State concerned, as
 9 the case may be.

10 **SEC. 4. GUIDELINES FOR SAFE TRANSPORTATION OF CHIL-**
 11 **DREN BY SCHOOL BUS.**

12 The Administrator of the National Highway Traffic
 13 Safety Administration shall develop and disseminate
 14 guidelines on the safe transportation in school buses of
 15 children under the age of 5. Such guidelines shall include
 16 recommendations for the evacuation of such children from
 17 such buses in the event of an emergency.

18 **SEC. 5. IMPROVED INTERSTATE SCHOOL BUS SAFETY.**

19 (a) APPLICABILITY OF FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER
 20 SAFETY REGULATIONS TO INTERSTATE SCHOOL BUS OP-
 21 ERATIONS.—Section 31136 of title 49, United States
 22 Code, is amended—

23 (1) by striking the second sentence of sub-
 24 section (e); and

1 (2) by adding at the end the following new sub-
2 section:

3 “(g) APPLICABILITY TO SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION
4 OPERATIONS OF LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES.—Not
5 later than 6 months after the date of the enactment of
6 this subsection, the Secretary shall issue regulations mak-
7 ing the relevant commercial motor carrier safety regula-
8 tions issued under subsection (a) applicable to all inter-
9 state school transportation operations by local educational
10 agencies (as defined in section 14101 of the Elementary
11 and Secondary Education Act of 1965).”.

12 (b) EDUCATION PROGRAM.—Not later than 6 months
13 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
14 shall develop and implement an education program in-
15 forming all local educational agencies (as defined in sec-
16 tion 14101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education
17 Act of 1965) that they must comply with the Federal com-
18 mercial motor vehicle safety regulations issued under sec-
19 tion 31136 of title 49, United States Code, when providing
20 interstate transportation on a school bus vehicle to and
21 from school-sanctioned and school-related activities.

22 (c) COMPLIANCE REPORTS.—Each year for the first
23 4 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
24 Secretary shall submit to Congress by June 1 a report
25 describing in detail the status of compliance by private

1 motor carriers (for-hire) and local educational agencies in
2 meeting the requirements of section 31136 of title 49,
3 United States Code, and enforcement actions undertaken
4 by the Department of Transportation.

5 **SEC. 6. DETERMINATION OF PRACTICABILITY AND FEA-**
6 **SIBILITY OF CERTAIN SAFETY AND ACCESS**
7 **REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUSES.**

8 (a) COMMENCEMENT OF RULEMAKING PROCESS.—
9 Not later than 6 months after the date of the enactment
10 of this Act, the Secretary shall begin a rulemaking process
11 to determine the feasibility and practicability of the follow-
12 ing:

13 (1) A requirement for a decrease in the flam-
14 mability of the materials used in the construction of
15 the interiors of school buses.

16 (2) A requirement that individuals, school dis-
17 tricts, or companies that sell in the secondary mar-
18 ket school buses that may be used in interstate com-
19 merce inform purchasers of such buses that such
20 buses may not meet current National Highway
21 Transportation Safety Administration standards or
22 Federal Highway Administration standards with re-
23 spect to such buses.

1 (3) The establishment of construction, design,
2 and securement standards for wheelchairs used in
3 the transportation of students in school buses.

4 (4) A requirement that school buses manufac-
5 tured after the effective date of the rule be equipped
6 with a bumper sensor, wheel guard, and front bump-
7 er gate and a system that automatically applies the
8 vehicle's brakes when the bumper sensor, wheel
9 guard, or front bumper gate makes contact with an
10 object or pedestrian.

11 (5) A requirement that school buses manufac-
12 tured after the effective date of the rule be equipped
13 with a system that detects a trapped obstacle in the
14 door of the vehicle and automatically applies the ve-
15 hicle's brakes, or provides a warning to the driver,
16 when such a object is detected.

17 (b) FINAL RULE.—Not later than 2 years after the
18 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall pro-
19 mulgate a final rule providing for any requirement or
20 standard referred to in paragraph (1), (2), (3), (4), or (5)
21 of subsection (a) that the Secretary determines to be fea-
22 sible and practicable.

1 **SEC. 7. CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS OF SCHOOL BUS**
2 **DRIVERS.**

3 (a) PROHIBITION ON EMPLOYMENT PENDING
4 CHECK.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law and
5 except as provided in subsection (b), a local educational
6 agency, and any contractor providing school transpor-
7 tation services to such an agency, may not newly employ
8 a person as a driver of a school bus of or on behalf of
9 the agency before the completion of a background check
10 of the person in the national criminal history background
11 check system. The purpose of the check is to determine
12 whether the person has been convicted of a crime which
13 would warrant barring the person from duties as a driver
14 of a school bus.

15 (b) EXCEPTION.—A local educational agency or a
16 contractor may newly employ a person as a driver of a
17 school bus of or on behalf of the agency if a check of the
18 person is not completed by the end of the 21-day period
19 beginning on the date of the request for the check by the
20 agency. The agency or contractor may commence such em-
21 ployment beginning at the end of such 21-day period.

22 (c) CHECK PROCEDURES.—Each State shall establish
23 procedures for conducting checks under this section. Such
24 procedures shall include the designation of an agency of
25 the State to carry out the checks and shall meet the guide-

1 lines set forth in section 3(b) of the National Child Protec-
2 tion Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 5119a(b)).

3 (d) LIMITATION ON LIABILITY.—A local educational
4 agency or a contractor providing transportation services
5 to such an agency shall not be liable in an action for dam-
6 ages on the basis of a criminal conviction of a person em-
7 ployed by the agency or contractor as a school bus driver
8 if—

9 (1) a check of the person was conducted under
10 this section; and

11 (2) the conviction was not disclosed to the agen-
12 cy or contractor pursuant to the check.

13 (e) FEES.—

14 (1) FEES IMPOSED BY STATE AGENCIES.—

15 (A) IN GENERAL.—A State agency des-
16 ignated under subsection (c) may impose and
17 collect fees for the provision of assistance in the
18 conduct of checks under this section. The
19 amount of such fees may not exceed the actual
20 cost to the State agency of providing such as-
21 sistance.

22 (B) MONITORING.—A State shall monitor
23 the collection of fees by an agency of the State
24 under this paragraph for purposes of ensuring
25 that—

1 (i) such fees are collected on a uni-
2 form basis; and

3 (ii) the amounts collected reflect only
4 the actual cost to the State agency of pro-
5 viding assistance in the conduct of back-
6 ground checks.

7 (2) FEES IMPOSED BY FEDERAL BUREAU OF
8 INVESTIGATION.—

9 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Federal Bureau of
10 Investigation may impose and collect fees for
11 the provision of assistance in the conduct of
12 checks under this section. The amount of such
13 fees may not exceed the actual cost to the Fed-
14 eral Bureau of Investigation of providing such
15 assistance.

16 (B) MONITORING.—The Attorney General
17 shall monitor the collection of fees under this
18 paragraph for purposes of ensuring that—

19 (i) such fees are collected on a uni-
20 form basis; and

21 (ii) the amounts collected reflect only
22 the actual cost to the Federal Bureau of
23 Investigation of providing assistance in the
24 conduct of background checks.

1 (f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section, the following defi-
2 nitions apply:

3 (1) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY.—The term
4 “local educational agency” has the meaning given
5 such term in section 14101 of the Elementary and
6 Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 8801).

7 (2) NATIONAL CRIMINAL HISTORY BACK-
8 GROUND CHECK SYSTEM.—The term “national
9 criminal history background check system” has the
10 meaning given such term in section 5(6) of the Na-
11 tional Child Protection Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C.
12 5119c(6)).

13 (3) STATE.—The term “State” means each of
14 the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the
15 Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

16 (g) APPLICABILITY.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
18 graph (2), this section shall apply to the new em-
19 ployment of persons by local educational agencies or
20 contractors beginning on the later of—

21 (A) the date that is 60 days after the date
22 of the enactment of this Act; or

23 (B) the date on which the State in which
24 the agencies or contractors are located estab-

lishes the procedures required under subsection
(c).

(2) EXCEPTIONS.—During the period beginning
on the date of the enactment of this Act and ending
on the date of the applicability of this section to a
local educational agency or contractor under para-
graph (1), the local educational agency or contractor
shall, to the maximum extent practicable, request
that the Federal Bureau of Investigation conduct a
background check with fingerprints of each person
newly employed by the local educational agency or
contractor as a school bus driver of or on behalf of
the local educational agency.

(h) FUNDING.—

(1) VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS.—Sec-
tion 4116(b)(5) of the Elementary and Secondary
Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7116(b)(5)) is
amended by striking “and neighborhood patrols”
and inserting “neighborhood patrols, and criminal
background checks of potential drivers of school
buses under section 5 of the School Bus Safety
Act.”.

(2) INNOVATIVE EDUCATION ASSISTANCE.—
Section 6301(b) of such Act (20 U.S.C. 7351(b)) is
amended—

1 (A) by striking “and” at the end of para-
 2 graph (7);

3 (B) by striking the period at the end of
 4 paragraph (8) and inserting “; and”; and

5 (C) by adding at the end the following:

6 “(9) the carrying out of criminal background
 7 checks of potential drivers of school buses under sec-
 8 tion 4 of the School Bus Safety Act.”.

9 **SEC. 8. ESTABLISHMENT OF MINIMUM REPORTING CRI-**
 10 **TERIA FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY PROGRAM ON**
 11 **TRAFFIC-RELATED DEATHS AND INJURIES.**

12 The Secretary of Transportation shall—

13 (1) not later than December 31, 1998, issue a
 14 notice of proposed rulemaking with respect to the
 15 minimum reporting criteria required under the tenth
 16 sentence of section 402(a) of title 23, United States
 17 Code; and

18 (2) not later than December 31, 1998, and
 19 after an opportunity for public comment, issue a
 20 final rule establishing such criteria.

21 **SEC. 9. SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY.**

22 (a) STUDY.—Not later than 3 months after the date
 23 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall enter into
 24 an agreement with the Transportation Research Board of
 25 the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study of

1 the safety issues attendant to transportation of school chil-
2 dren to and from school and school-related activities by
3 various transportation modes.

4 (b) TERMS OF AGREEMENT.—The agreement entered
5 into in subsection (a) shall provide that—

6 (1) the Transportation Research Board, in con-
7 ducting the study, consider—

8 (A) in consultation with the National
9 Transportation Safety Board, the Bureau of
10 Transportation Statistics, and other relevant
11 entities, available crash injury data, and if un-
12 available or insufficient, recommend a new data
13 collection regimen and implementation guide-
14 lines; and

15 (B) vehicle design and driver training re-
16 quirements, routing, and operational factors
17 that affect safety and other factors that the
18 Secretary considers appropriate; and

19 (2) the panel conducting the study shall include
20 representatives of highway safety organizations,
21 school transportation, mass transportation providers,
22 employee organizations, academic and policy ana-
23 lysts, and other interested parties.

24 (c) REPORT.—Not later than 12 months after the
25 date of entry into the agreement under subsection (a), the

1 Secretary shall transmit to the Committee on Transpor-
 2 tation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives
 3 and the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Af-
 4 fairs of the Senate a report containing the results of the
 5 study.

6 **SEC. 10. PILOT PROGRAM TO ASSESS BENEFITS OF EQUIP-**
 7 **PING SCHOOL BUSES WITH SAFETY RE-**
 8 **STRAINT DEVICES.**

9 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall carry out
 10 a pilot program to assess the benefits of equipping school
 11 buses with Aaron Gordon type flight attendant double
 12 shoulder harness mechanisms or other safety restraint de-
 13 vices providing equal or greater passenger protection.

14 (b) GRANTS.—In carrying out the program, the Sec-
 15 retary may make grants to one school district for equip-
 16 ping school buses in the district with safety restraint de-
 17 vices described in subsection (a).

18 (c) FEDERAL SHARE.—The Federal share of the cost
 19 of a project carried out using a grant under subsection
 20 (b) may not exceed 50 percent of such cost.

21 **SEC. 11. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

22 There are authorized to be appropriated such sums
 23 as are necessary to carry out this Act.

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