



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Charles J. Fuschillo Jr.

Senator Fuschillo Announces Senate Passage of New Bus Safety Measures

CHARLES J. FUSCHILLO JR. March 28, 2012

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Senator Charles J. Fuschillo, Jr. (R-Merrick) announced that the New York State Senate has approved a measure to implement an enhanced bus safety inspection system. The measure, which was included as part of the state budget legislation, will help improve passenger safety by allowing DOT to perform more inspections on problem bus operators.

“DOT needs every possible resource to ensure that bus operators meet the required safety standards. Enabling the DOT to perform additional inspections on operators who don’t comply with these standards is a commonsense step to make our roads safer,” said Senator Fuschillo, Chairman of the Senate’s Transportation Committee.

Under the new system, DOT will be able to conduct follow up inspections on operators who fail any of their previous inspections. These inspections would be in addition to the routine inspection DOT performs on all operators every six months. Currently, all bus operators undergo one routine inspection every six months, regardless of whether or not they meet DOT safety standards.

There have been numerous incidents which highlight the growing need to improve safety in the bus industry. The most notable occurred on March 12, 2011 when a tour bus

returning to New York City from a Connecticut casino crashed in the Bronx, killing 15 people. According to reports, the driver of the bus, Ophadell Williams, had prior convictions for manslaughter, grand larceny, and driving without a license. His driver's license was suspended following the crash after evidence surfaced that he made false statements on his application form.

Thousands of DOT roadside inspections conducted throughout the course of 2011 following the crash resulted in at least 530 drivers and 460 vehicles being removed from the road.

Senator Fuschillo also called for the enactment of legislation he sponsors to require criminal background checks for all bus drivers. The legislation (S5171B) would help prevent drivers from using aliases or false names to hide conviction of criminal offenses which would disqualify them from holding a license. The New York State Inspector General recommended requiring criminal background checks for all bus drivers in a September 2011 report investigating licensing and oversight of commercial bus drivers following the March 12, 2011 Bronx bus crash. The legislation has been passed by the State Senate and is awaiting action by the Assembly.

“Bus passengers entrust their safety and well being to their driver every time they ride a bus. Drivers who are unfit to handle that responsibility do not belong behind the wheel, but some have used fraud to beat the system and illegally obtain a license. Background checks would help these unqualified bus drivers from getting on the roads, and that's why this law should be approved immediately,” Senator Fuschillo added.