



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Charles J. Fuschillo Jr.

Senator Fuschillo, Da Rice, & Assemblyman McDonough Call for New Law to Protect Children From Drunk Drivers

CHARLES J. FUSCHILLO JR. October 17, 2012

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Legislation Would Require Ignition Interlocks in All School Buses

Photo caption: Senator Fuschillo shows how an ignition interlock can be used to prevent a drunk driver from getting behind the wheel. He is joined by (l-r) Merrick resident Al Belbol, Jr., District Attorney Rice, Wantagh resident Susan Walpole, and Assemblyman McDonough.

Senator Charles J. Fuschillo, Jr. (R-Merrick), Nassau County District Attorney Kathleen Rice, and Assemblyman David McDonough (R-North Merrick) today joined together in calling for a new law to protect school children from drunk drivers.

Recently, a school bus carrying 5 small children crashed into a Syosset home after its driver passed out behind the wheel. The driver of the bus was charged with five counts each of aggravated DWI under Leandra's Law, endangering the welfare of a child, reckless endangerment and two counts of DWI.

The legislation, which is cosponsored by Senator Fuschillo and supported by D.A. Rice and Assemblyman McDonough, would require ignition interlocks to be used on school buses as a way to prevent drunk drivers from getting behind the wheel of a school bus. Ignition interlocks are breath test devices linked to a vehicle's ignition system which prevent it from starting if alcohol is detected in the driver's breath.

"School bus drivers literally hold students lives in their hands. We have strong laws to hold bus drivers accountable after they have been drinking; now we need to prevent them from even having the chance to drive drunk behind the wheel of a bus. Requiring school buses to be equipped with ignition interlocks will provide a defense against drunk driving for children who can't defend themselves," said Senator Fuschillo, Chairman of the Senate's Transportation Committee.

"Nothing is more important than the safety of our children, and this legislation will create a critical check to ensure that no bus driver endangers our kids by driving a bus drunk. We know ignition interlock technology saves lives, and I'm glad to partner with Senator Fuschillo to support this important effort to keep our kids safe on the way to and from school," said District Attorney Rice.

Under the legislation, all school buses manufactured after July 1, 2013 for use in New York State would be required to come equipped with an ignition interlock device. The proposed law would also give local Boards of Education the authority to adopt a resolution to install ignition interlocks into school buses manufactured prior to July 1, 2013.

Last Wednesday, a school bus driver was pulled over on the Long Island Expressway after 911 operators received reports that he was driving with a shredded tire and had trouble controlling the vehicle. The driver was arrested after police found his blood alcohol level to be .23, ten times the legal limit for a commercial driver. The driver, who also had a half empty vodka bottle with him in the bus, told police that he had just dropped off middle school students from the Three Village School District.

In a 2009 incident in Western New York, a school bus driver was arrested for driving drunk with 37 students on board. Some of the older students, noticing the driver's erratic driving behavior, actually opened the bus' rear emergency door and exited the bus while it was stopped on the road.

Local parents joined Senator Fuschillo and District Attorney Rice in calling for the new law.

"As a parent and as a PTA Co-President, my greatest priority is the safety of our children. This legislation will help ease the minds of parents across NY State when we put our kids on a school bus. I totally expect other states to follow with similar proactive legislation," said Al Belbol, Jr., a Merrick parent and co-president of the Levy-Lakeside Elementary School PTA.

Susan Walpole, a Wantagh parent and co-president of the Mandalay Elementary School PTA, said "As the mother of four children, there's nothing more important to me than their safety. When I put my children on the school bus, I have to trust that the driver is doing

everything possible to keep them safe. No one should be able to get behind the wheel and drive drunk with a bus full of children. Ignition interlocks would add another level of protection to prevent that from happening. That's why I believe we need this law."

"Our children are our future, and their safety needs to be paramount. It is far better to be proactive and prevent tragedies before they happen rather than reactive when it's too late. DEDICATEDDD supports this measure to help protect children and we thank Senator Fuschillo and District Attorney Rice for once again being at the forefront in the fight against drunk driving," said Marge Lee, President and Co-Founder of DEDICATEDDD.

New York would be the first state in the nation to require ignition interlocks on school buses.