



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Charles J. Fuschillo Jr.

## Senator Fuschillo's Legislation to Require Background Checks for All Bus Drivers Approved by Senate Transportation Committee

CHARLES J. FUSCHILLO JR. February 12, 2013

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Senator Charles J. Fuschillo, Jr. (R-Merrick) today announced that legislation he sponsors to require all bus drivers to submit to a criminal history check has been approved by the New York State Senate's Transportation Committee. The legislation would help prevent bus drivers from using aliases to hide from their criminal histories when applying for a driver's license.

"Bus drivers are entrusted with the lives and safety of their passengers. We should not assume that everyone claiming to be qualified to handle that tremendous responsibility actually is. Background checks are a commonsense and proactive way to ensure that unqualified individuals cannot hide their criminal histories and obtain a license through fraud," said Senator Fuschillo, Chairman of the Senate's Transportation Committee.

Senator Fuschillo's legislation (S761) would require criminal background checks for all bus drivers to help prevent them from using aliases or false names to hide criminal offenses that would disqualify them from holding a license. Currently, this requirement applies only to school bus drivers.

There have been numerous incidents which highlight the growing need to improve safety in the bus industry. The most notable occurred on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 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.

Since 2011, DMV investigations have led to the arrest of at least 27 commercial bus drivers for using fraudulent documents to obtain a valid commercial driver license under an alias. Enacting Senator Fuschillo's legislation would aid the state's efforts to improve bus industry safety by creating a new tool to help prevent dangerous bus drivers from getting behind the wheel in the first place.

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 National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) also recommended stronger background check requirements for driver as part of a report it conducted on the same crash.