



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Survey Finds 600 Local Drivers Ignored Stopped School Buses

PATTY RITCHIE June 15, 2017



Senator Patty Ritchie today released the results of a survey in which local school bus operators caught 600 drivers illegally passing stopped school buses in Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence Counties—more than 100 a day—and announced Senate passage of a series of bills meant to protect children’s safety by cracking down on the dangerous violators.

Over the course of five school days, Senator Ritchie asked bus drivers in school districts across the three-county region to keep a daily count of vehicles that ignored their lights and

warning signs and drove by in violation of state law. The survey, conducted from March 13-17, involved 365 bus drivers from 31 local school districts.

In Jefferson County, bus drivers reported being illegally passed 176 times; in St. Lawrence County, 84 times, and in Oswego County, a whopping 317 times.

“As a mother and a grandmother, I’m concerned about the safety of our children when they leave home and travel to and from school,” said Senator Ritchie. “But when drivers are too distracted to see—or they simply ignore—a stopped school bus with red lights flashing and warning signs extended, it’s real cause for concern.”

“I would like to thank the school bus drivers from throughout Central and Northern New York who took time to participate in my safety survey, which helped me in crafting the legislation that has now passed the Senate. Together, we can encourage drivers to take extra caution and in turn, create a safer environment for students.”

Measures supported by Senator Ritchie and approved by the Senate to bolster student safety include:

- Increased penalties when death or serious injury occurs as a result of illegally passing a stopped school bus (S.5733, sponsored by Senator Ritchie)

- Increasing the penalties for drivers caught passing buses while using an electronic device(S.5898-A, sponsored by Senator Ritchie)

- Institutes a school bus safety component to driver education courses(S.5974)

- Suspending the driver license when a person is convicted of passing a school bus two or more times with a 10 year period (S.1064)

-Stiffer penalties for those who pass school buses, also requires an individual who injures someone while passing a bus be charged with aggravated vehicular assault and if a person is killed after passing a bus, that driver would be receive a charge of criminally negligent homicide (S.1023)

-A measure doubling the penalty for passing a stopped school bus—currently \$50 to \$400 for first offenses, and up to 30 days in jail—while driving a heavy truck (S.5897, sponsored by Senator Ritchie)

In addition, Senator Ritchie announced passage of several bills that would improve safety by disqualifying from driving a school bus someone who failed a drug or alcohol test, and those with previous convictions for an expanded list of crimes, including sex offenses and crimes involving improper dealings with children.

“Even though school is out for most students, it’s still important to exercise caution on the road,” said Senator Ritchie. “Many buses are still on the road transporting students to school-related summer programs and of course, there are more children outdoors enjoying their summer vacation.”

In addition to counting illegal “passes,” Senator Ritchie’s survey also asked drivers for their opinions on a series of proposals that target violators.

More than half of school bus drivers said they favored increased penalties, including license suspensions, and increased fines for “passers” who were using their cell phones or other electronic devices at the time.

Most drivers said they supported installing cameras on buses to capture images of passing vehicles.

(A complete list of observed illegal passings, by school district, is attached.)

