

Ashley Jackson
Augusta
LD 2159

WRITTEN TESTIMONY (MAINE STATE HOUSE – JANUARY 29)

In Support of School Bus Safety Legislation

Chair, members of the committee, and fellow community members,

My name is Ashley Jackson, and I am submitting this written testimony in support of this school bus safety bill. I am unable to attend in person on January 29th, but I want my voice and my concerns to be included in this discussion.

This bill matters because we are talking about children — and when it comes to children, safety cannot be optional. We send our kids to school trusting they will come home. We trust the systems in place. We trust the adults in charge. And we trust that the transportation meant to protect them is doing exactly that.

School buses are often described as one of the safest ways for students to travel, and I understand that. But “generally safe” does not mean “safe enough.” Injuries and tragedies still happen, and when they do, the impact is permanent. Families don’t recover from “almost.” A community doesn’t forget a preventable loss.

This bill is important because it focuses on prevention — not reacting after something goes wrong.

One major concern is that one school bus driver is often responsible for 30 to 60 children at one time. That is a huge responsibility for one person to manage alone, especially during the most dangerous moments of the ride — when children are getting on or off the bus, crossing the road, or moving near traffic. In many childcare settings and youth programs, adult-to-child ratios are strictly regulated because we recognize that supervision matters. It is hard to understand why we accept such a different standard on a school bus, where the risks can be just as serious.

That is why I strongly support adding trained bus aides or monitors, especially for larger routes or younger age groups. This is not about blaming drivers — it is about acknowledging reality. Drivers cannot safely watch the road, manage student behavior, monitor the danger zones around the bus, and handle emergencies all at the same time. Support staff can help prevent injuries and improve overall safety.

I also support implementing technology that increases visibility and reduces preventable accidents. This includes 360-degree camera systems to reduce blind spots and help drivers see children and hazards around the bus, especially near the wheels and crossing areas. It also includes doors that will not close if something or someone is detected in the doorway, helping prevent injuries caused by accidents and human error.

Another piece that matters is education. Children cannot be expected to know what they are never taught. I believe schools should provide bus safety training during open houses or school events, so children and families understand safe behavior when boarding, riding, and exiting. Repetition and consistency save lives.

Finally, I believe we should also consider driver readiness and safety evaluations, along with existing drug and alcohol testing requirements that many commercial drivers already follow. This is not about making it hard for people to keep jobs. I respect school bus drivers, and I know many do an excellent job under difficult conditions. But we also have to be honest: we are entrusting them with children year after year. Safety must be the priority, and confirming driver readiness is a reasonable step when the responsibility is this high.

This bill is not extreme. It is not unrealistic. It is responsible. It addresses known risks with solutions that make sense: supervision, visibility, training, and accountability.

I urge you to support and pass this bill. Our children deserve to be protected, and Maine families deserve to know that safety is being taken seriously — before another preventable tragedy happens.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.

Respectfully,
Ashley Jackson
Augusta, Maine