

Louise Brulotte-Pettiford
Dover
LD 2159

Simon Gonzales

I am writing with great concern regarding the safety of children riding school buses in Maine, particularly in the wake of the tragic deaths of 12 year old Brayden Callahan of Rockland, and 5 year old Simon Lewis Gonzales of Standish. Their deaths highlight the critical need for immediate action to improve school bus safety and ensure that such preventable tragedies never happen again.

In honor of Brayden and Simon, I respectfully urge you to support the passage of the Brayden-Simon Lewis Bus Safety Act, which would introduce comprehensive safety measures aimed at protecting children on school buses. Below are key provisions I believe should be included in this bill:

1. Increased Stopping Arm Penalties: Increasing penalties and enforcement for drivers who illegally pass a school bus with its stop-arm extended, to ensure all drivers understand the seriousness of this violation.
2. Installation of Cameras and Enhanced Visibility Features: Requiring the installation of cameras on school buses to capture footage of any drivers who disregard stop signals. Additionally, improving bus lighting, reflectors, and signage will make buses more visible to other motorists, especially in low-visibility conditions.
3. Introduction of Bus Monitors: Implementing a program to hire and place safety monitors on buses, especially on routes where younger children or special-needs students are involved. These monitors can assist children while boarding and exiting the bus, ensuring that backpacks and other items don't get caught in bus doors, or that children are not left behind. Or mandatory (legalized) parental supervision getting children on and off buses
4. Training for Bus Drivers on Common Hazards: Expanding training programs for bus drivers, so they are better equipped to recognize potential dangers, such as backpacks getting stuck or students needing help while getting on or off the bus. Bus drivers should be trained to spot these hazards and address them proactively.
5. Public Awareness Campaigns: Launching educational programs aimed at informing both drivers and students about the importance of bus safety. This could include raising awareness about proper behavior while waiting for the bus, as well as safe boarding and exiting procedures.
6. Enhanced Bus Design and Safety Features: Requiring schools to upgrade buses with additional safety features like emergency escape hatches, high-visibility decals, and more secure ways to stow backpacks and personal items.

The Brayden-Simon Lewis Bus Safety Act represents a critical step forward in ensuring that no other child, family, or community has to endure a similar tragedy. By implementing these safety measures, we can provide greater protection for our children and foster a safer environment for everyone who relies on school buses to get to and from school.

I strongly encourage you to support this legislation, and I am happy to speak with you to discuss these suggestions further. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter, and for your commitment to making school buses safer for all children.

Sincerely, ^[1]_{SEP} Louise M. Pettiford