

Testimony in Support of LD 2159

January 28, 2026

Chair Nangle, Chair Crafts, and Distinguished Members of the Transportation Committee:

I write today as Assistant Superintendent of Saco Schools on behalf of three public school departments in southern Maine, collectively serving nearly 5,000 students. I strongly urge your support of LD 2159, with recommended amendments, as legislation that would significantly enhance school bus safety by requiring all school buses to be equipped with and use crossing arms, as well as anti-pinch sensors. A pair of fatal incidents involving buses highlight the urgency of this low-cost, commonsense improvement.

On a typical school day, our three districts' buses travel approximately 2,287 miles collectively—equivalent to driving round-trip to Nashville, Tennessee every single day. Our transportation teams navigate crowded neighborhoods, busy intersections, and changing weather conditions in their commitment to safely transport our students to and from school. Behind every route is a caring, professional bus driver who takes that responsibility to heart. Safely transporting students is one of our highest priorities, and we have comprehensive safety protocols in place.

Our school bus drivers perform daily pre-trip and post-trip vehicle inspections as required by Maine Department of Education regulations, and all buses are subject to twice-annual state inspections. Despite these safeguards, we have seen an increase in reports of vehicles illegally passing stopped school buses while red lights are flashing and stop arms are extended. These violations put children at serious risk—particularly when they are crossing the street or stepping on or off the bus. Even a moment of inattention can have life-altering consequences. The tragic incidents that have impacted our entire educational community underscore the urgent need for additional protective measures.

LD 2159, as currently drafted, represents an important step forward, but I respectfully urge the Committee to strengthen this legislation through specific amendments:

1. The legislation should be amended to require that ALL school buses, regardless of model year, be equipped with crossing arms and that these crossing arms be actively used. The current draft of LD 2159 addresses the use requirement but does not extend the equipment requirement to all buses. This creates an incomplete safety framework. We need comprehensive protection that ensures every bus, regardless of age, provides the same level of safety for our students.

2. The Committee should expand this legislation to include anti-pinch sensor technology for all school buses. LD 62, passed in 2023, requires that year 2025 and later buses be equipped with anti-pinch sensors. However, many of our buses predate this requirement. Anti-pinch sensors provide critical protection during the boarding and exiting process, preventing doors from closing on students and reducing the risk of serious injury.
3. While we wholeheartedly support enhanced safety requirements, retrofitting existing school bus fleets with crossing arms and anti-pinch sensors represent an unbudgeted, not insignificant capital expense that most districts cannot absorb within their current budgets. I am encouraged that [Governor Mills has announced proposed funding for retrofitting all buses](#) with crossing arms and anti-pinch sensors. However, I understand this funding may be grouped with other projects in the budget. I respectfully but strongly urge that school bus safety funding be separated as a distinct appropriation. The safety improvements contemplated by an amended LD 2159 can only be achieved if adequate state funding accompanies the mandate.
4. The legislation should include an appropriate implementation grace period to allow school districts adequate time for proper training of personnel on the use of new safety equipment, ordering of necessary parts and technology, managing delivery schedules, and completing professional installation. A reasonable grace period—such as 12 to 18 months from the date of enactment—would ensure that districts can implement these critical safety measures correctly and thoroughly, rather than rushing installations that could compromise effectiveness. This timeline would allow for competitive bidding processes, coordination with qualified vendors, and comprehensive staff training programs.

Beyond these specific amendments, I encourage the Committee to consider any additional advanced safety measures that current technology can provide. I believe families and educators across the state share the goal to ensure that every child boarding a school bus in Maine has access to the highest level of protection that modern safety technology can provide.

We continue to work closely with local law enforcement to address illegal passing violations and have launched a comprehensive school bus safety awareness campaign in collaboration with our Transportation Department and the local police departments. This includes a public service announcement video currently in production and school assemblies planned for all students. However, education and enforcement alone are not sufficient. We need the physical safety infrastructure that crossing arms and anti-pinch sensors provide to create truly safe conditions for our students.

The commitment to safe student transportation is a shared responsibility that extends from school bus drivers and district administrators to legislators and state officials. LD 2159, strengthened through amendments and supported by dedicated state funding, represents a meaningful opportunity to make Maine's school buses safer for every child. This is not merely a regulatory improvement—it is an investment in the lives and wellbeing of our students, whose safety we hold as our highest priority.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2159 with amendments requiring all school buses to be equipped with and use crossing arms and anti-pinch sensors, providing an adequate implementation grace period for proper training and installation, and to ensure that adequate state funding is appropriated separately to support district implementation of these critical safety measures.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "M. Parkhurst". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Meg Parkhurst, Assistant Superintendent of Schools