

LD 312 - An Act Regarding the Rates of Speed at Which School Buses Travel

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation. I am here today in support of LD 312 - An Act Regarding the Rates of Speed at Which School Buses Travel.

My name is Joe Schneider and I have more than 20 years' experience in the school bus industry. I am currently employed by Region Two School of Applied Technology as their Transportation Director. Prior to the position with Region Two, I was with RSU# 29 as the Director of Operations. In both of these positions, the primary focus of my duties is school bus safety and training. I have also had a long-standing safety & training relationship with RSU #50, RSU #70, RSU #89 and RSU #84. During my 20 years in school transportation, I have trained a large contingent of new drivers as well as provided ongoing annual continuing education in the area of school bus safety for school bus drivers and monitors.

School bus drivers are expected to operate their vehicles safely within the set speed limits, taking into account the prevailing road conditions.

School bus drivers undergo extensive training that includes driving at safe and appropriate speeds. They are trained to handle various road conditions, traffic scenarios, and other challenges that may arise while transporting students. They are trained to communicate effectively with other drivers, anticipate road hazards, and maintain a safe distance from other vehicles. Their training enables them to make informed decisions that prioritize the safety of their passengers. For example, drivers are instructed to pay careful attention to the line of traffic that forms behind them while they are picking up and dropping off students during their daily routes. They are told to pull to the side of the road, in a safe location, to let traffic pass so it minimizes the risk of a car or truck passing a stopped bus that is picking up or dropping off students. However, despite this extensive training weather conditions and road design sometimes make pulling over in a safe location impossible. Sometimes it's because of snow banks or maybe just inadequate space for a bus to safely pull over. Consequently, school buses themselves can become a hazard on the road due to the 45 MPH speed limit restriction. Many motorists, including, and most frequently, impatient tractor trailer drivers pass school buses that are travelling below the posted speed limit i.e 45 MPH in a 55 MPH zone. In inclement weather tractor trailers passing a school bus often results in a heavy spray of road water or slush that temporarily blinds the driver of the school bus. These safety issues pertaining to the 45 MPH speed limit are observed throughout the state but, are more prevalent in rural vs urban areas due to differences in density.

It is my opinion that a school bus traveling at the posted speed limit can frequently be safer than a school bus that is restricted to 45 MPH. School bus drivers have the training and ability to know when the situation warrants a slower speed. However, they should have the ability to make an informed decision to travel up to the posted speed limit, without breaking the law, when driving the posted speed limit is the safer option.