



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Cheryl Golek in support of
LD 2159, An Act to Require School Buses to Be Equipped with and to Use
School Bus Crossing Arms
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Cheryl Golek, and I represent District 99, which includes Harpswell and part of Brunswick. I am here today to give my full and unwavering support to **LD 2159, An Act to Require School Buses to Be Equipped with and to Use School Bus Crossing Arms**.

I am heartsick that this bill is before you under such tragic circumstances—two recent school bus incidents in Rockland and Standish that claimed the lives of two Maine children. These losses should never have happened, and they underscore the urgency of this moment.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time a bill of this nature has come before you. I stood in this very room in 2019 as a mother and as a constituent of the Honorable Jay McCreight to testify in support of LD 19, An Act To Require Public School Buses To Be Equipped with School Bus Crossing Arms.

LD 19 was born from a deeply personal tragedy. Almost 30 years ago now, on November 17, 1997, my 7-year-old son Michael stepped off his school bus on what should have been an ordinary day. As he crossed in front of the bus, the driver did not wait long enough and drove forward. Michael was caught on the front bumper, dragged down the road, then released onto the pavement. As he tried to move, the front tires ran over him, followed by the double back tires. His 5-year-old brother ran into the street and tried to pull him to safety.

Michael suffered severe trauma to his small body—but he lived. I have spent more than two decades fighting to prevent other families from experiencing what we did.

LD 19 passed with good intentions, but it was amended so that crossing arms would only be required on new buses.

In 2023, I found myself back in this room—this time as a legislator—after two more preventable tragedies in our state. I introduced LD 62 following two school bus dragging incidents in 2022: one in Buxton, where a 6-year-old boy's backpack was caught in the door and he was dragged

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nearly 700 feet; and another in Auburn, where a 10-year-old boy was dragged 50 to 60 feet before the bus stopped. LD 62 also passed, but again, it was amended to apply only to new buses.

The difference today is that the funding we did not have support for then is available now.

LD 2159 creates the path to finally finish what these earlier bills began. Governor Janet Mills has announced a proposal for approximately \$4.3 million to enhance safety measures on Maine school buses, including retrofitting existing buses with crossing arms and anti-pinch door sensors. In her press release, she referenced both LD 19 and LD 62—acknowledging the long-standing need for these protections.

Now, with LD 2159 and the funding commitment before us, we have the opportunity to extend these life-saving protections to every bus on the road—not just new ones.

So I stand before you today to ask, plainly and urgently: pass LD 2159 today. Move it into work session and pass it today. The funding has been promised. The need is undeniable. The tragedies are real. And our children's lives and safety depend on us acting now.

Let us do today what we did not do in 2019 or 2023. We owe it to the families who have lost children, to the children who survived, and to every parent who puts their child on a school bus each morning. Let's finish the job and protect every child who steps onto a school bus in the state of Maine.

Thank you for your time, your commitment and giving me the opportunity to speak today.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.