

Revised 3-Minute Testimony

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Committee on Transportation. My name is Steffany Tribou, and I am from Owls Head.

I wear several hats: I am a parent, a longtime member of the Midcoast community, and an administrator dedicated to student safety. You have heard powerful testimony today about the importance of protecting children, and I echo those sentiments. My deepest condolences to the families and communities who have experienced tragic loss.

I want to begin by commending Representative Geiger, Representative Matlack, and Senator Beebe-Center for their swift work on this emergency legislation. Their willingness to listen and act quickly on transportation safety has been both reassuring and inspiring.

I am here today in support of this bill as well as in support of continued thoughtful, research-based revisions to this bill, provided it includes clear statutory guidance and dedicated funding so that all Maine students, regardless of district size or resources, receive equal protection.

L.D. 19 from the 129th Legislature was an important step. It required crossing arms on newly purchased buses beginning in 2021. However, L.D. 19 fell short in three key areas: it excluded much of Maine's existing fleet...older buses; it provided no guidance on when or how crossing arms should be used; and it lacked sufficient funding to offset costs for districts. This bill offers the opportunity to address all three gaps left by L.D. 19.

Safety equipment alone is not enough without clear expectations for use. Crossing arms are designed to protect students in the highest-risk zone in front of a bus. Yet Maine remains a "local discretion" state for both installation on older buses and use regarding all buses, resulting in inconsistent practices and inequitable safety outcomes.

National data shows that states with both installation requirements and clear usage expectations have fewer front-of-bus-related accidents. I urge you to review model policy from other states such as Georgia, Wisconsin, and Delaware for their clarity of expectations.

And I urge your committee to focus on three goals as this bill moves forward.

First, clarify statutory language so drivers and districts know exactly when and how crossing arms are to be used, drawing on strong models from other states.

Second, ensure this is a funded mandate. Without funding, safety requirements disproportionately burden our more rural districts and undermine equity.

Third, clearly define any permitted use of automatic recycling interrupt switches to avoid ambiguity and unintended safety risks. That's the switch that cancels the use of a crossing arm. You might compare and contrast Wisconsin's and Delaware's approaches to this language in particular.

In closing, this bill has the potential to save lives, but only if it delivers on clarity, consistency, and equity. I respectfully propose that you continue refining this legislation so that crossing arms function as the life-saving devices they are intended to be for every Maine student.

Thank you for your time,
Steffany Tribou