

LD 2159

Good afternoon, Chair, members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Brittany.

I live in South Thomaston, Maine.

I'm here because I'm angry and I'm concerned—and I know I'm not the only one.

In just over a month, we lost two little boys to school bus incidents that never should have happened.

Brayden Callahan—12 years old—struck in Rockland because the crossing arm wasn't deployed by a bus driver who didn't even care to sit properly to have his eyes on the children.

Simon Lewis Gonzalez—5 years old—dragged and killed in Standish because no one saw his arm was pinned in the door.

These are not statistics.

These are Maine's children.

They are our most precious gift.

We must pass LD 2159—requiring crossing arms on every school bus in the state is a no-brainer.

Pass it now. Make it emergency legislation.

Crossing arms work: Twenty-five other states already require them, and data shows they help reduce danger-zone fatalities and illegal passing incidents. In the Rockland tragedy, a deployed crossing arm very likely would have saved Brayden's life.

But crossing arms alone are not enough, clearly because Brayden's bus was equipped with a crossing arm- but it was not deployed, why?

We need to breathe life back into basic, standard safety.

Every winter I see school buses driving through the local area with rear windows completely caked in dirt and grime from the roads—so thick you can't see into the bus from behind.

These are massive vehicles carrying living, breathing children—not perishable goods.

We can't let them roll down the road without clear visibility. That's not acceptable.

And we need real human vigilance, especially on routes with young kids.

Bus drivers need to be the best of the best professional operators focused on the road and

the safety of their passengers- our children.

These drivers are professional operators- not babysitters.

Yet they're expected to drive safely while also managing behavior, boarding, exiting, and hazards—sometimes overseeing 50–70 elementary students on a single route, per national and industry standards for full-size buses (three small children per 39-inch seat, up to 72 max capacity).

Compare that to Maine's licensed daycares and preschools: State rules require strict staff-to-child ratios—for example, 1 adult per 10 preschoolers (ages 3–5) and school chaperone ratios are anywhere from 1:10 - 1:5 depending on where the field trip is.

These are stationary environments with trained staff focused solely on supervision.

Yet on a moving bus full of high-energy, often neurodivergent kids—where about 20% of Maine public school students (over 34,000) receive special education services, many with ADHD or autism—we ask one driver to handle it all alone?

That's an impossible overload, and it puts every child at risk.

A dedicated bus aide or monitor on elementary routes (especially for kids 12 and under) changes that.

Aides provide the extra eyes and hands to assist with safe boarding/exiting, redirect behavior, catch hazards like a lingering child or pinned arm, and let the driver focus on driving.

This isn't luxury; it's layered protection that complements tech and prevents tragedies no sensor can fully stop.

Governor Mills' recent \$4.3 million proposal to retrofit nearly 1,700 buses with crossing arms and anti-pinch door sensors is a strong start—averaging roughly \$2,000–\$2,500 per bus after bulk discounts and efficiencies, with room if costs come in lower. Let's build on that momentum to ensure funds support not just hardware, but human vigilance like aides too.

We need a safety stand-down—a statewide moment where everyone remembers:

We are carrying life's most precious gift.

We are carrying children.

And we must protect them like they are our own—by loving them enough to hire people who truly care about them, to hold school and government officials in charge of background checks and licensures accountable, to keep windows clean, to use the cross arms we have, and give students and drivers the support they need to make it to and from school every day- safely.

Pass LD 2159 immediately.

Then let's go further:

Mandate annual hands on bus safety courses with students and parents,

360 cameras with heads up display,

aides on needed elementary routes,

enforce basic visibility (even in winter months),

and make Maine the state that puts our kids first—every single time.

Thank you.

I'm happy to answer questions.

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In considering these upgrades, it's important to look at the real costs and benefits.

Equipping a school bus with a reliable 360-degree camera system typically involves a one-time upfront cost of \$1,000–\$3,000 per bus, plus \$300–\$1,000 for professional installation and calibration.

After that, ongoing expenses are minimal—mostly routine maintenance and power usage. This provides passive, 24/7 safety: a full surround view to spot children in blind spots, potential integration with crossing arms for alerts, and recording for accountability—all without requiring additional staff on every route.

By contrast, assigning a human bus aide or monitor to an elementary route costs \$10,000–\$15,000+ annually per bus (based on Maine district rates of roughly \$19–\$21 per hour for part-time roles, plus payroll taxes, workers' compensation, training, and benefits). While aides offer active supervision—excellent for managing student behavior and direct intervention—technology like 360 cameras excels specifically at visibility and detection during the highest-risk loading/unloading phases, where human error or blind spots can occur. Many districts already use aides primarily for student management rather than pure external hazard prevention.

Given Maine's ongoing challenges with bus driver and aide shortages, relying solely on staffing is labor-intensive and hard to scale reliably. A combined approach—mandating modern tech like 360 cameras alongside aides where needed—offers the strongest protection while being more sustainable long-term.

***I do believe if we took an in depth look at school funding we could move some funds around to support an important role like a bus aide.