



Paul T. Davis, Sr.
Senator, District 4

130th MAINE SENATE

3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

**Testimony of Senator Paul Davis
Presenting L.D. 1509, An Act To Provide That Maine's School Bus Drivers Are Eligible for
Unemployment Insurance in Certain Circumstances
Before the Labor and Housing Committee
May 3, 2021**

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: I am Senator Paul Davis and I have the honor of representing the people of District 4, which includes all of Piscataquis County and parts of Penobscot and Somerset counties. I am before you today to present testimony on L.D. 1509, An Act To Provide That Maine's School Bus Drivers Are Eligible for Unemployment Insurance in Certain Circumstances.

Despite the Legislature making some changes pertaining to Unemployment Insurance (UI) eligibility before adjourning the 129th Legislature, school administrative employees were faced with uncertainty on when they would return to work – or if they would at all. This posed a problem for many of our school bus drivers.

I submitted this bill after hearing from bus drivers in my District, one of whom I believe you will hear from today. Although they received payment through the end of the school year, they were unable to collect UI because they had signed a letter of intent to return to work. If they did not sign, they were told that the School Administrative Unit would find someone to replace their position. By signing this letter, many bus drivers were put in a bind. They could not collect UI – nor could many seek other employment on the chance that school would return as usual following summer vacation. We were right in the middle of the pandemic and it was still very unclear as to when they would actually be called back to work.

As the Legislature made exceptions for individuals in other professions, our school bus drivers were left stuck between a rock and a hard spot. Should we be faced with a similar circumstance moving forward, I think it is important that we look into addressing this issue now. For that reason, I have submitted L.D. 1509 that would allow school bus drivers to be eligible for UI for any week that the school does not require their service due to an extraordinary circumstance, like the pandemic, beyond the bus driver's control.

Our school districts are already facing difficulty in recruiting and retaining bus driver's; through the passage of this legislation we can address an important issue while simultaneously showing current bus drivers and those who may be interested in driving bus that we are looking out for them not just now, but also during extraordinary times.

I encourage the committee to support this legislation and I am happy to take any questions you have at this time.