



ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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IN THE NAME OF CHILDREN

Alabama lawmakers are sending this message to motorists who unlawfully pass stopped school buses unloading or picking up students.

On April 5, 2006, ALABAMA GOV. BOB RILEY signed into law a bill that will help keep students getting on or off school buses safe from irresponsible motorists. The new

bill increases penalties for drivers who illegally pass stopped school buses on any road – including highways, roadways, school property, or private roads – and penalties will increase incrementally with each new offense.

Riley signed the bill with hopes that public knowledge of more severe penalties will curb this deadly violation. “The most dangerous part of a school bus ride is when the bus stops. Motorists who illegally passed a stopped school bus have killed four and injured seven Alabama children since 1998. No child or family should ever experience such a tragedy,” Riley said. “This new law is one I know our parents welcome, our school bus drivers welcome, and certainly our children welcome.”

The bill was sponsored by **REPRESENTATIVE RANDY DAVIS**, R-District 96, and **SENATOR TED LITTLE**, D-District 27. One of the fatalities resulting from an illegal passing violation was the death of 5-year-old **MEAGAN TOOMEY** in May of 2000.

Meagan’s untimely death, along with the other victims, deepened Little’s resolve to help bring this bill to fruition. “One of the reasons we set these higher standards is in Meagan’s honor so that her life will continue to be meaningful to future

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young girls and boys who are taking advantage of the school bus opportunity,” Little said. “Motorists need to know when you see a school bus it is not the time to be in a haste, it is not the time to be speedy, and it is not the time to be cool. When you see the lights of a school bus, you’ve got a law to abide by and you need to do so or the punishment will be severe.” Little said with more days added to the school calendar next year, there will be that many more opportunities for motorists to encounter school buses, and hopefully act accordingly. He sees the standards set in the new legislation as a tribute to Megan and a life gone too soon.

Another incentive embedded in the new legislation is that the law enforcement agency issuing the citation will keep 90 percent of the fine. This encourages the authorities to watch for illegal school bus passing even more keenly than before. It also puts motorists on notice that they are being watched.

DON INGRAM, transportation director for Auburn City Schools, said this incentive, along with a good relationship between school officials and local police, might make a significant difference. “Hopefully [the financial incentive] will inspire police to make even more of an effort to be watchful for violators,” Ingram said. “We have a great rapport with our police here. I ask our drivers to report back and tell us areas and times where illegal passing is frequent. We then pass those locations on to local authorities so they can be there to patrol and witness any infraction.”

Ingram said awareness of the offense is also important. He said there are many inexperienced drivers who just don’t know what the rule is when it pertains to a stopped school bus. Getting the word out and making sure motorists understand are most important. He said when you have a college town like Auburn, a lot of students are from other states where the laws are different, and maybe some drivers just don’t know.

Little said one good thing about this law is that it now unifies the entire state regarding the penalty.

“We have more than 7,000 school buses on the road in Alabama every school day, with more than 350,000 students going to and from school daily. In one day, there could be more than 2,000 infractions throughout the state. Now the law is uniform so if school bus safety standards are violated, the judge will have the same punishment upon conviction in all areas of the state,” said **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION DIRECTOR JOE LIGHTSEY**. “The law will be uniform throughout the state and progressive in its punishment. The more you violate the law, the more severe the penalty.” 🍏

AN ILLEGAL PASSING SURVEY FROM THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SHOWS:

- 🛑 1,862 documented illegal passes of school buses in 2005 - up from 1,746 in 2004
- 🛑 Of those, 97 percent came from motorists who passed on the left side
- 🛑 55 percent of illegal passes occurred in the afternoon
- 🛑 68 percent were cars, 27 percent were light trucks, and 66 percent occurred on two-lane roads

PENALTIES FOR ILLEGALLY PASSING A STOPPED SCHOOL BUS

FIRST CONVICTION
Fines from \$150 to \$300

SECOND CONVICTION
Fines from \$300 to \$500
100 hours community service
License suspended 30 days

THIRD CONVICTION
Fines from \$500 to \$1,000
200 hours community service
License suspended 90 days

FOURTH CONVICTION
Class C Felony
Minimum Fine of \$1,000
License suspended one year