



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
STATE DIRECTORS OF
PUPIL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

August 7, 2009

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
313 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Menendez
528 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay R. Hagan
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mary L. Landrieu
328 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Schumer, Menendez, Hagan, and Landrieu:

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) is pleased to support Senate Bill 1536, the Avoiding Life-Endangering and Reckless Texting by Drivers Act of 2009 (the "ALERT Drivers Act"), which would require states to prohibit all motorists from writing, sending, or reading text messages while driving.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services was founded in 1968, and represents a cross section of individuals and organizations involved in the safe transportation of school children. As the Association's name indicates, individuals with the primary responsibility for school transportation in each state are members. In addition, school bus manufacturers, equipment and service suppliers to the school bus industry, school transportation contractors, and a number of state associations whose members include school transportation officials, drivers, trainers, and technicians also are members of the Association. Based on this diversity in membership, we believe NASDPTS provides a unique perspective on pupil transportation issues and speaks for a large segment of the nation's pupil transportation community.

School buses comprise the nation's largest system of public transportation and continue to be far safer than the other ways students get to and from school. This safety record is due to high standards for the qualifications and training of school bus drivers and stringent, specialized federal and state standards for the safety construction and maintenance of school buses. NASDPTS has actively endorsed and supported Congress and federal agencies for many years in efforts to ensure highway safety, with particular emphasis on the safety of transported school students.

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The Association supports the recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB, November 21, 2006, SB-06-65) and other organizations that federal and state governments prohibit the use of cell phones by motor coach and school bus drivers except in emergencies. Many of our members' states have adopted legislation prohibiting the practice. We believe it is important to limit distractions to any motorist, especially inattention arising from the use of cell phones and texting devices. These devices must not be used while actively operating motor vehicles.

The ALERT Drivers Act, requiring states to ban texting while driving, was proposed as a result of recent high profile crashes involving commuter trains. As stated in the Act, the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute recently found that operators of motor vehicles had a collision risk 23 times greater when they were texting. The American Medical Association has identified cell phone texting while driving as a public health risk. There is no question that the practice is unsafe.

While studies confirm that school buses are the safest transportation choice for America's students, we believe the ALERT Drivers Act will reinforce our existing training, laws, and compliance in the important area of prohibiting distracted driving. More importantly, the Act will improve the safety of our most vulnerable driving population, those teen drivers who drive themselves, their siblings, and their friends to and from school and other venues in their private cars.

The ALERT Drivers Act is critical for overall highway safety, and we thank you for sponsoring it. Please let us know if NASDPTS and its members can provide information or be of any assistance as this bill proceeds through the legislative process. You can contact our Executive Director, Bob Riley, at ExecDir@nasdpts.org, (970) 871-1784, or me at Charlie.Hood@fldoe.org, (850) 245-9795. We also encourage you or your staff to visit our Web site at www.nasdpts.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charlie Hood".

Charlie Hood, President
NASDPTS