



April 1, 2022

STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF THE CARDIN-WICKER AMENDMENT TO THE COVID HEALTH SUPPLEMENTAL

The National School Transportation Association (NSTA) supports the Cardin-Wicker planned amendment to the Covid Health Supplemental to provide an additional \$2 billion to the CERTS relief program, as well as make CERTS grants tax-exempt.

NSTA is the leading resource for school bus transportation solutions and the voice for private contractors for over 55 years. We are a membership organization for school bus contract-operators engaged primarily in transporting students to and from school and school-related activities. Members range from small family businesses serving one school district, to large corporations operating tens of thousands of buses across multiple states. Regardless of size, our operators are staunchly committed to the safe and efficient transportation of our nation's schoolchildren. Private school bus contractors account for 38 percent of the nation's pupil transportation services and employ more than 250,000 individuals as bus drivers, mechanics, maintenance workers, dispatch, and office workers.

Daily, almost 26 million K-12 students are transported by an estimated 480,000 yellow school buses. Every day, the lives of these children are entrusted to certified school transportation professionals, who have received special training and have the experience to ensure the safe transport of students. School buses remain the safest way to transport a child to-and-from school, and school-related activities, as they are the most regulated form of transportation. Students are significantly safer riding to and from school in a school bus than walking, riding bikes, or riding/driving in their family car. The number of fatalities of school age children traveling to and from school, per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT), is 70 times higher in passenger vehicles than in school buses.

School bus companies suffered tremendous losses during the pandemic as schools closed and many districts refused to pay school bus contractors. NSTA estimates that 60 percent of school districts did not pay contractors during school closures, despite expressing the desire to have the contractor keep their valued employees and be ready to restart transportation on a moment's notice. The CERTS program was crucial to help school bus contractors stay viable and continue to employ our valued employees, however, the CERTS program was initially appropriated at \$2 billion. The Department of Treasury received applications from companies totaling over \$8 billion in revenue losses from 2019-2020. This figure does not include additional revenue losses our companies incurred in 2021 as the pandemic still kept many schools shut down for much of last year as well.

The amendment also includes a provision to provide tax exemption for CERTS relief grants, consistent with other Covid relief programs, such as the Paycheck Protection Program, restaurant and venue relief programs. While we deeply appreciate the CERTS grant funds designed as emergency relief due to the devastating impacts of the pandemic on our businesses, CERTS funds should be treated the same as other covid relief when it comes to taxes.

NSTA strongly supports the amendment to provide critical additional funds and tax relief to help school bus companies continue to recover, so that we can provide safe and efficient school bus transportation to the nation's schoolchildren.