



Catching Unlawful School Bus Passers With Cameras

By Douglas Shinkle

While yellow school buses are by far the [safest option to transport students to and from school](#), it can be dangerous to be outside the bus. Traveling by school bus is about seven times safer than traveling by personal vehicle, and only 1 percent to 2 percent of student transportation fatalities are associated with school-bus travel. Boarding and exiting the bus put students most at risk of injury or death because drivers may ignore or don't understand laws requiring them to stop for school buses. Between 2003 and 2012, 84 pedestrians between ages 5 and 13 died in school transportation-related crashes.

Typically, state laws require vehicles on both sides of a road without a median to stop and remain stopped while school bus stop arms and flashing red lights are deployed. However, an annual survey of school bus drivers organized by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services reported that 75,966 vehicles passed school buses illegally on a single day in 2014. Similar studies conducted by states and school districts also indicate that motorists' failure to stop for school buses is a persistent problem. Now, states are looking to increase their ability to catch school-bus-passing scofflaws by allowing counties, cities or school districts to install cameras on school buses to record such violations.

State Action

Laws in 13 states—Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington, Wyoming and West Virginia—authorize the use of school bus cameras to catch motorists who illegally pass a school bus.

In 2014, the Wyoming Legislature became the first state to require that all school buses have cameras, beginning with the 2016-17 school year. The costs associated with installing the cameras may be reimbursed similarly to other district-covered transportation costs. South Carolina also enacted legislation in 2014, allowing a school bus to be equipped with a recording device that can capture a clear view of vehicles passing, the date and time of the infraction, and an electronic symbol indicating activation of the amber lights, flashing red lights, stop arms and brakes. Indiana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Tennessee debated, but did not pass, bills in 2014 authorizing the use of cameras to catch illegal passing of school buses.

In 2013, Illinois and North Carolina enacted laws concerning the use of cameras on school buses to reduce illegal passing. Illinois expanded its definition of automated traffic law enforcement to include school bus cameras designed to capture images of vehicles unlaw-

Did You Know?

- A 2014 survey of more than 97,000 school bus drivers found that 75,966 vehicles illegally passed school buses on a single day.
- Thirteen states explicitly allow their local governments or school districts to use cameras to capture drivers illegally passing stopped school buses.
- Revenue from tickets for violating school bus passing laws goes to a variety of sources, including the state general fund, school safety zone improvements, transportation funding and private vendor reimbursement.

fully passing a stopped school bus. For each violation, the locality with jurisdiction sends a ticket to the violator captured in the image, with a fine not exceeding \$150 for a first violation and \$500 for a second or subsequent violation. North Carolina's original school bus camera law was backed by the state's Child Fatality Task Force, which was created in 1991 by the legislature. Legislation in 2013 created minimum fines for illegal passing, revocation of the driver's license for a second offense within three years, and stiffer penalties for striking and/or killing a person while illegally passing a school bus. The law also encourages local boards of education to use fine proceeds to purchase cameras for school buses to help detect and prosecute violators. The Child Fatality Task Force is [considering introducing 2015 legislation](#) to give cities the option to contract with private firms to administer a school bus camera program.

State laws vary on distribution of proceeds from school bus camera violations; some direct a certain amount to a locality, while others use the revenues for school safety zone improvements. Illinois law requires that fine proceeds be divided equally between a school district and municipality or county. It also states that compensation to vendors must be for equipment costs and services, not for the number of tickets issued or revenue generated. In Maryland, revenue can be used to cover the costs of implementing the program, with any remaining balance to be used for public and pedestrian safety programs, as long as the fine revenue is not more than 10 percent of the total revenue for the locality that year. The Washington Legislature authorized school districts to use school bus cameras, with any revenues beyond administrative and operating costs directed to school zone safety projects.

Some states give school districts or local governments the option of administering a program themselves or contracting with a private vendor. In Connecticut, for example, the law allows a municipality or local or regional board of education to install, operate and maintain a live digital video school bus violation monitoring system or to enter into an agreement with a private vendor. Some state laws, such as Maryland's, require the local jurisdiction to approve the use of cameras. In Maryland, a locality's governing body may approve their use following a notice and public hearing.

A few states—including Connecticut, Illinois and Rhode Island—require alerting motorists to the presence of a camera. Illinois has the most detailed requirements: A sign must be posted on each school bus equipped with a camera, and localities must post on their websites a list of school districts that use school bus cameras. The locality also must conduct a statistical analysis to assess the safety of cameras on school buses, using available before-and-after data.

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NCSL, [School Bus Safety Webpage](#)

NCSL, [Transportation Review: School Bus Safety](#)