



# Drive Up Standards

# NEWSLETTER

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

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## The Power in Politics Issue

In this edition of the Drive Up Standards Newsletter, we took a look at some of the ways Teamster Bus Drivers are flexing their political muscle.

### Meet Some of the Local 638 School Bus Drivers Who Are Lobbying for Change



"We work hard to make sure that kids get to and from school safely every day, transporting the most precious cargo that there is, and we deserve to have unemployment insurance just like every other seasonal worker in the state. Construction workers in Minnesota are also eligible for unemployment insurance when they're not working. Why not us?"

—Steve Johnson



"I'm a constituent of Kurt Daudt, the Speaker of the House, so I was able to meet with him and explain why this legislation is so important. One of the reasons this is important is that not all school districts offer summer school. Mine does, but many of the smaller districts have no routes available outside of the normal school year. In the summer months, even after I sign up for every route that's available, I still take a huge pay cut."

—Dawn Petersdorf



"I'm confident that we can push the bill through if we have a Democratic majority, but majority or not, nothing will get done unless we make our presence known and keep pushing. The bus companies are hurting for drivers so badly right now that we get pressured to come in even when we are sick. That compromises the children's safety. We lose a lot of drivers every summer because there's not enough work for everyone. Retaining drivers improves safety and quality of work, as the more experienced drivers know the area and the routes better. Drivers with years of seniority also have more confidence and experience with student management."

—Tina Ruberto



For more than three years, Minnesota Teamsters have been advocating at the capital in St. Paul for legislation that would extend unemployment insurance to school bus workers during the summer. Thanks to the recent electoral victories of pro-worker candidates in the midterm elections, they just might get the chance to see these bills finally become law.

The legislation has had bipartisan support in the state senate. Sen. Jim Abeler is the Republican author of the bill, SF 946, and he is joined by four co-sponsoring senators from the Democratic–Farmer–Labor (DFL) Party: Jerry Newton, Fong Hawj, Gregory D. Clausen and Senate Minority Whip John A. Hoffman.

In the Minnesota House of Representatives, however, the legislation has stalled in the past, failing to move out of the Job Growth and Energy Affordability Committee, chaired by Sen. Pat Garofalo (R – Farmington). Garofalo has refused to even hold a hearing on the legislation. While Garofalo kept his seat during the 2018 election, because Republicans lost control of the statehouse, he will lose his committee chairmanship.

A new committee chair means the legislation has a chance to finally get a hearing, and with bipartisan support in the senate, Minnesota school bus workers employed by private contractors may finally have the income security that workers in 44 other states already have — unemployment insurance during the summer.

"The meetings have been very productive regardless of whether we are talking to Republicans or Democrats," said Local 638 Secretary-Treasurer Trevor Lawrence. "Getting bills passed through the legislative process is always a lengthy, difficult process, but with committed school bus members meeting with their elected officials, we have a chance of moving this legislation forward."

The Teamsters "Drive Up Standards" newsletter is by and for school bus drivers, monitors and mechanics.  
This newsletter is published quarterly in print and online at [www.driveupstandards.org](http://www.driveupstandards.org).



## Sun Tran Teamsters Give Voters Free Rides to the Polls

The city of Tucson offered free transit fares all day on Election Day 2018 to make it easier for citizens to vote. Teamster drivers for Sun Tran, Sun Link and Sun Van, represented by Local 104, were happy to do their part.

"We want to make it as easy as possible for voters to get to the polls," said Mayor Jonathan Rothschild. "The right to vote is so important, and we want to ensure that everyone who's eligible to vote has the opportunity to vote."

"I think it's great that the city is willing to give people free rides to exercise their civic duty," said Local 104 Business Agent Kevin Hampton. "Our members are happy to participate in this program and we are grateful for their service."

Chief Operations Steward Misty Ingraham has worked at Sun Tran for over 20 years. She said that Local 104 was very active with mobilizing members for Election Day this year.

"Politics plays a huge part in what we do," Ingraham said. "A lot of decisions are made at the local level. The city council plays a huge role in determining our pay, routes, budgeting and everything else."

Larry Paxton is also a steward for Local 104. He echoed Ingraham's sentiment regarding the importance of participating in elections.

"I vote every year, primarily so I can complain," Paxton said. "If you don't vote, you can't complain. Even though my candidate may or may not make it, I'm still going to put in my two cents. A lot depends on who we put into office."

## Building Teamster Political Power in Illinois

by Mildred Cross and Phyllis Pepper, Local 777

*One thing that we heard a lot this past year was that this was the most important election of our lifetimes. At Local 777, we acted accordingly and worked hard on behalf of our endorsed candidates.*

*Arguably the most important race in Illinois was the governor's race. The Teamsters endorsed J.B. Pritzker over the incumbent Gov. Bruce Rauner. Pritzker has demonstrated to us that he is committed to fighting for workers, unlike Gov. Rauner, who continually tried to shift the burden of the state's debt onto Illinois citizens. Rauner's policies have been bad for working people throughout the state. We endorsed J.B. Pritzker because he has promised to move our state in the right direction, and we think he will deliver on that promise.*

*People don't always realize how much politics has an effect on them. We often hear people say "my vote won't count," but it most definitely does. That's why the Teamsters launched an intense campaign across the state to get out the vote for our endorsed candidates. Local 777 partnered with Local 743 by sending our stewards to the University of Chicago, where we spent four days talking to the Teamster members who work in student dining at the school. We phone-banked throughout the campaign getting our members to turn out and vote. We went up to Hodgkins, Ill., where we spoke to our UPS members and*



*handed out more than 500 fliers in under an hour!*

*The responses that we got from our members were varied. Most of them were positive and receptive, but we were disappointed to see that some of our younger members didn't know if they were registered to vote. We provided them with a phone number that they could text to get registered. A few people weren't interested or said that they vote Republican. We always made it clear to them that no matter what their political party was, they needed to vote for the people who were going to help us, as working people. Some of our members were people who weren't receptive at first, but after we talked to them, we got through to them and they changed their mind.*

*On election night, there was a smile on everyone's face because we knew that we had accomplished what we had set out to do. Congratulations to our new Governor, J.B. Pritzker, and to everyone who went out there and voted!*



## DRIVE is Political Power in the School Bus Industry

By Jeanette Barnes, IBT DRIVE Representative

I started out as a school bus driver in Prince George’s County, Maryland, in 1995. My co-workers and I organized our yard and we became members of Teamsters Local 639. As a former school bus driver, I can tell you that being engaged in politics is of particular importance to workers in our trade.

If it wasn’t for politics, we wouldn’t have lunch breaks, weekends or an eight-hour work day. All of these things were created by acts of congress. None of it was given to us, people died to make it happen, and I don’t take any of that for granted.

Private school bus contractors are looking to make as much money as they can, and part of what we need to do is not just stand up for ourselves in our bus yards, but also put pressure on school boards to adequately fund transportation and hold contractors ac-

countable. School districts outsource transportation to contractors to save money, but the cost savings to school districts and profits to contractors shouldn’t come out of our end.

That’s also why we work to get our allies elected to school boards. We need people on that board who are looking out for us, so we find people who are going to support our members and get them to run. We also encourage our membership to run as well – people think that you need to be an expert to run for office, but that’s just not true. What’s more important is having a politician who knows what it’s like to do a hard day’s work!

I increase my DRIVE contribution ever year, and I encourage everyone to donate to DRIVE because it’s an investment in your future. That’s why corporations spend so much money on politics—it’s an investment.

**D**RIVE (Democrat, Republican, Independent Voter Education) is a political action committee (PAC) funded by Teamster members. My job as a DRIVE Representative is to grow our PAC, turn out our members for our Teamster-endorsed candidates, and campaign for Teamster members who run for office.

## Michigan Teamsters Call for Tougher Penalties for Stop-Arm Violations



**T**elevision and newspaper reports regularly highlight the serious challenges that school bus drivers and bus monitors encounter on their daily routes. Each day behind the wheel of a school bus is a new adventure, one made increasingly difficult

by the number of close calls, injuries or deaths between students and vehicles that illegally pass a stopped school bus.

“The law is clear,” Local 243 Secretary-Treasurer Neil Pettit said. “Vehicles that approach a stopped school bus with red lights flashing and the stop-arm extended must stop at least 20 feet away and wait until the red lights are turned off. Even though school buses remain a safe method of transporting students to and from school, children are most vulnerable when they are either entering or exiting the bus.”

A national survey found that more than 83,000 drivers illegally pass school buses every day—that’s more than 15 million violations in a typical school year. Surprisingly, many of the drivers surveyed said that they either didn’t see the bus or that they didn’t think they had to stop. Some said that since they didn’t see any students, they thought it was OK to pass, obviously not understanding the potentially fatal consequences. Just a few days after the 2018 school year began in Michigan, five children were killed and seven others injured

over a three-day period because motorists failed to stop.

“Running past stop-arms is a near-daily occurrence around here and something that I have seen happen way too often,” said Local 243 Steward Deaneria Chaverst, a Durham School Services Driver in Ann Arbor, Mich. “How can anyone truthfully say that they didn’t notice a big yellow school bus with flashing red lights and a stop sign? People need to put down their phones, pay attention and obey the laws. One second of distraction can have deadly results.”

Improving school bus safety is a complex issue that requires a coordinated response. School bus drivers, monitors, students, parents, teachers, school board officials and law enforcement agencies must work as a team to enhance public awareness. The first step, however, is for elected officials to enact tougher penalties for school bus stop-arm violations. Right now, Michigan drivers who disobey school bus stop-arms receive a civil infraction and a fine up to \$500. Drivers who are found guilty of failing to stop will also get three points added to their license, thus increasing the cost of their auto insurance.

Michigan’s newly elected state government officials must work to improve the state’s school bus safety laws. Teamsters hope that a combination of public education and enforcement will make the changes necessary to improve overall safety.

“We need to take action now, before something horrible happens and we all ask why something wasn’t done earlier,” Pettit said. “Michigan motorists need to get the message that when red lights are flashing, there is absolutely no passing.”



## **Solidifying Our Role in a Growing Industry**

*By Rick Middleton, Teamsters Passenger Transportation Division Director*

Teamster Brothers and Sisters,

It has been more than a year since General President James P. Hoffa announced the creation of the newest trade division in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the Passenger Transportation Division. As Western Region International Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer of Local 572, I have seen the growth of Teamster power in this industry, and as the Director of the Passenger Transportation Division, I am committed to using that power to benefit each and every one of our members.

I wanted to take this opportunity to catch you up to speed on what the division, YOUR division, has been up to since it was created. I am proud to announce that we have continued to grow our union and increase our density in this industry. The passengers we carry vary by sector of the industry, and so do the experiences of our members. It is our job at the division to support our local unions so that we can all continue to raise standards. Our goal from the beginning was to grow our membership, use our power to support good companies and hold bad companies accountable.

I am happy to report that our national relationship with FirstGroup continues to offer opportunities to raise standards through industry-leading contracts. The Teamster-First Student National Master Agreement is an important tool for members and locals to address issues of national concern. We continue to work to bring the other major players in the industry in line with the high standards we have secured with FirstGroup.

In school transportation, we are doing just that. In 2018, we successfully negotiated a master agreement with North American Central School Bus, the fourth largest school bus company in the country, and just the second master agreement in the industry. We followed that up with even more exciting news: We successfully negotiated a freedom of association agreement with National Express/Durham. After battling this company’s vicious anti-union tactics for years, the Teamsters Union mounted an effort to bring the company to the table and reach an understanding about conduct during elections. This agreement is an important milestone in our goal of creating a set of standards across the industry that is based on respect of our members.

I am also pleased to report on recent developments with the third-largest private school bus contractor in North America, Student Transportation, Inc., also known as STA. I am encouraged by the news of a partnership between Ullico, Inc. and the Quebec Deposit and Investment Fund (CDPQ) to acquire STA in the coming months. The Teamsters Union supports this move and believes that with new ownership, there is the potential for a start to a new chapter with STA that will see improved relations that will benefit our members and all STA workers. I have asked Division Representative Jim Shurling, who is also President of Local 512 and Joint Council 75, to oversee our efforts as we move forward on this exciting venture.

As we look to the future, we are focused on solidifying our relationships with these companies and expand to other employers, such as Student Transportation, Inc. I am confident that we will continue to establish our role as the leading voice for workers in the school bus industry. We are committing to the same effort on behalf of our members in other areas of passenger transportation: paratransit, shuttle, coach and fixed routes. A small group of powerful multinational companies dominates the passenger transportation industry as a whole, and it is up to us to demand that our members are a priority in their operations. I look forward to working with our local unions, Joint Councils and international and community allies so we can secure strong agreements and set high standards throughout the industry.

In solidarity,

Rick Middleton

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