

---

---

# ***Public Hearing***

before

## **ASSEMBLY TASK FORCE ON COURTESY BUSING**

*“Information for the study of courtesy busing of pupils in New Jersey”*

---

---

**LOCATION:** South Brunswick  
Municipal Building  
South Brunswick, New Jersey

**DATE:** December 2, 1996  
3:00 p.m.

### **MEMBERS OF TASK FORCE PRESENT:**

Assemblywoman Barbara Wright, Chairwoman  
Assemblywoman Connie Myers  
Assemblyman Joseph R. Malone III  
Assemblywoman Barbara Buono  
Assemblywoman Shirley K. Turner

### **ALSO PRESENT:**

William J. O'Brien  
Office of Legislative Services  
Aide, Assembly Task Force on  
Courtesy Busing



*Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by*  
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,  
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, CN 068, Trenton, New Jersey

---

---



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Senator William E. Schluter District 23	4
David N. Thomas, Ed.D. Superintendent Hopewell Valley Regional School District	7
Danielle Miller Private Citizen	11
Donna Saieva Private Citizen	12
Samuel B. Stewart, Ed.D. Superintendent South Brunswick School District	14
Sandy Kowalsky Head of Transportation South Brunswick School District	17
Captain Frederick Thompson South Brunswick Police Department	18
Janice S. Mironov Mayor East Windsor Township, New Jersey	21
Kathy Leonard Private Citizen	26
Gerard Schaller Assistant Superintendent West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District	29
John Henderson New Jersey School Boards Association	34



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)**

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Mary Ellen Procaccini Coordinator New Jersey ALLIANCE of Catholic School Families and Supporters	40
Larry Thompson, Ed.D. Catholic Schools Superintendent Diocese of Trenton	43
Iris Mariani PTA President St. Raphael's School Trenton, New Jersey	45
Joan Ponessa Director of Research Public Affairs Research Institute of New Jersey, Inc.	46
Rabbi Chaim Jurkanski Administrator Lakewood Cheder School	53
Eileen Markous Private Citizen	57
Alane Levine Private Citizen	62
Gus Kakavas Director of Transportation Toms River Regional Schools, and Legislative Chairman School Transportation Supervisors of New Jersey	64
<b>APPENDIX:</b>	
Letter addressed to Ms. Barbara Wright from Richard and Danielle Miller	1x



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)**

### **APPENDIX (continued):**

#### **Page**

Letter addressed to Barbara W. Wright from Donna Saieva	2x
Statement submitted by Kathy Leonard	3x
Statement submitted by Gerard Schaller	5x
“Chronology of Court and Commissioner Decisions and Legislative Action Relevant to the Issue of Courtesy Busing” plus attachments submitted by John Henderson	9x
Testimony submitted by Mary Ellen Procaccini	23x
Brochure submitted by Joan Ponessa	26x
Letter addressed to Honorable Barbara Wright plus attachments submitted by John G. Waltz	34x
Statement plus map submitted by K. Homyak	50x
Statement submitted and written by K. Homyak for A. Dewan	54x
Letters submitted by Ellen Milionis	55x



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)**

### **APPENDIX (continued):**

#### **Page**

Letter addressed to  
Ms. Barbara W. Wright  
from Robert J. Bartoletti  
Chief School Administrator  
Cranbury Township School District

57x

lmb: 1-79 (Internet edition 1997)



**ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARBARA WRIGHT (Chairwoman):**

I'd like to call this hearing to order. I'm Assemblywoman Barbara Wright and the Chairman of the Task Force.

Can you hear us out there? I'm not sure whether we're being-- Are we just recorded, we're not-- The microphones are not on. They are on, okay. If you can't hear us in the back at some point, just raise your hands, and we'll try to speak loudly enough so you can hear us.

I want to thank you all for attending this first public hearing that we have held of the Task Force on Courtesy Busing. I would like to open with a few introductory remarks since this is the first public hearing, and we have not had a lot of opportunity, as a Task Force, to have much discussion. We did have our first meeting this morning at which Assembly Speaker Jack Collins addressed us. Also, we did have discussion with the Department of Education Commissioner Klagholz. So we are somewhat on our way, but we're kind of moving along at one step at a time.

I just wanted to point out that certainly, according to the Department of Education analysis of pupil transportation study, which some people are calling the Deloitte-Touche study, we found that over 570,000 students are transported in New Jersey. About 400,000 public students were eligible for aid. It was estimated that 127,000 received nonmandated busing. So it gives us some perspective in terms of how many students we are transporting.

In 1968, the statute that we're presently working under said that "whenever, in any district, there are elementary pupils who live more than two miles from their public schools of attendance or secondary school pupils who



live more than 2.5 miles from their public school of attendance, the district shall provide transportation to and from school for those pupils.” In 1996, we formed this Assembly Task Force following a resolution that was passed in our House. It has the intent to study the public school busing with regard to safety, cost efficiency, and funding.

I wanted to raise some of the questions that we will be addressing in hopes that these are some of the questions you also will bring some of the answers to for us. The first, under safety, I have raised: Should the mileage limits that we defined in the law be modified based on safety concerns for a route? Secondly: In determining a hazardous route in urban, suburban, and rural situations, which criteria should be used to define the hazardous route? And third: Which agency should have the authority to designate a hazardous route, and what process should be used?

Under cost efficiency, I have just one item: What are some of the cost-effective methods that can be used to ensure safe travel to schools? Because we know that there are other ways than only busing.

And then, under funding, I have: Who has the authority and responsibility for ensuring safe routes of travel? Is it the Board of Ed? Is it the township municipal government? What role does State government have, for example? And second: Who has the authority and responsibility for paying for those safe routes of travel? And third: How should safe travel to schools be addressed in a thorough and efficient education, which has been one of the tough issues for us to deal with, and I know some of our districts who are here to testify?



Our Task Force will receive information from the Department of Education and Transportation. We will be reviewing the statutes. We have more than a dozen bills that have already been introduced in both Houses. We will be looking at those bills, and we will consider alternatives or combinations or any of the above. We will conduct public hearings. In January 1997, we will submit a final report to our Assembly Speaker with our recommendations.

So as a background for where we are headed, I wanted to share with you some of where I see us going and then open the meeting to-- First, I will ask if any of the Assembly members would like to testify today. Before that, I will ask Bill O'Brien, who is our chief staff assistant here from the Office of Legislative Services -- Bill is on my right -- and he's going to call the roll. And then I will ask the members if they wish to speak.

MR. O'BRIEN: Assemblyman Malone?

ASSEMBLYMAN MALONE: Here.

MR. O'BRIEN: Assemblywoman Myers?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MYERS: Here.

MR. O'BRIEN: Assemblywoman Turner?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TURNER: Here.

MR. O'BRIEN: Assemblywoman Buono?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Here.

MR. O'BRIEN: Chairwoman Wright?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Here.

Before we begin, is there anyone on the Task Force who would like to speak? (no response) Okay.



We really are focusing this on constituents. We do have the opportunity, however, to have one legislator who asked to testify before us. And it's common courtesy in our Houses to have the legislators speak first. So I plan to ask Senator William Schluter to come forward. He is from District 23, neighboring district from Hunterdon County and Warren. I believe he has with him one of the superintendents from his District, David Thomas, from Hopewell Valley School District. If they could both come forward.

Thank you, and the mikes are right there.

I have asked the Task Force members if they could primarily listen to testimony. We are asking you to keep your testimony to five minutes. In the case of two spokespersons, we would allow you ten if it will take you that long. We do not plan to interrogate you. We primarily want to hear for the record what your comments are. So if--

Senator Schluter would you like to proceed, please?

**SENATOR WILLIAM E. SCHLUTER:** Thank you very much, Assemblywoman and Task Force members.

I did present testimony before you, which is written, and I will go through it, because I think it is so important, and it is so urgent. Superintendent Thomas is with me to answer questions if you have them, because some of this is very detailed and gets into the budgetary process of school districts.

Everyone in New Jersey agrees that there is a serious safety problem in the busing of our children to public schools. The archaic limits of busing grammar school students only if they live more than 2 miles from the school and high school students only if they live 2.5 miles distant do not take



into account the increasing hazards that are present close to the schoolhouse.

Your Task Force has a number of proposals before it. Senator Littell has advanced the concept that the entire matter of school busing should be reformed and possibly placed under the umbrella of a county agency. Other proposals speak to the issues of 2- and 2.5-mile limits, reimbursement from State transportation funds for the shorter bus routes, and standards which might be used to determine when hazardous conditions demand a reclassification of the present limits.

I bring to your attention Senate Bill No. 1587, which I introduced on September 19 and which addresses school busing matters of an extremely urgent nature. Assemblyman Lance has introduced identical legislation as Assembly Bill No. 2345.

First and of considerable significance, the term which I recommend that your Task Force use for this problem should be safety busing, not courtesy busing. The safety of schoolchildren is at stake. This is no longer a matter of convenience for children or parents.

Senate Bill No. 1587 declares safety busing is a budget item which cannot be removed by the Department of Education from thorough and efficient budgetary stipulations. Unfortunately, up until the present, the Department has taken the position that safety -- courtesy busing -- is exempt from calculation of a district budget's cap. This means that those districts which are overcapped must go before the voters for specific approval of this component of busing which, according to Department commentary, is unnecessary for a thorough and efficient education. Such referenda are doomed to failure.



Second, Senate Bill No. 1587 states that “individual districts must pay the full cost of safety busing. This cost cannot be reimbursed from State transportation funds.”

Finally, Senate Bill No. 1587 allows these revisions to be implemented in the current school year, notwithstanding the fact that voters may have turned down a referendum on safety busing. It is my belief that there are many school districts which would like to have this opportunity because of emergency conditions right now.

I am respectfully suggesting that your Task Force make an interim recommendation to approve Senate Bill No. 1587 and Assembly Bill No. 2345 to take care of urgent situations in many school districts. Also, enactment of this legislation would allow the schools that anticipate exceeding budget caps for the 1997-1998 school year to budget wisely for safety busing, even if the final recommendations of your Task Force have not been implemented.

Your study is both important and appropriate. But we cannot hamstring school boards who want to provide immediate safety busing from doing so. Let us not wait for the tragedy of a death or a severely injured child to force the education community and the Legislature to act now rather than wait for the perfect, long-range solution.

Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I’m sure Dr. Thomas, in a few minutes, can elaborate and can give you and answer any detail about this matter where the Commissioner will force a referendum which is doomed to failure for those schools districts and only those school districts, who are overcapped.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Please proceed, Dr. Thomas.



**DAVID N. THOMAS, Ed.D.:** I'd simply like to--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Could you give your name for the record?

DR. THOMAS: Dr. David Thomas, Superintendent of Schools, Hopewell Valley Regional School District.

I'd simply like to reinforce and support everything the Senator said. This is a problem that was created by the Commissioner two years ago when, for some reason, he decided that he would change the status quo. The status quo was working fine, and it always worked fine.

The local school districts paid for this entirely out of their local funds, and they declared whenever there were high-speed roads or lack of sidewalks or some safety condition-- It wasn't an issue. Commissioner Klagholz came along two years ago and picked on the school districts that had to ask for a Commissioner's cap waiver. That was only the few of us who had grown a lot. Our district's grown 7 percent or 8 percent every year for the last several years.

The only districts that were eligible for a cap waiver were those that had grown more than 2 percent for two years running. Well, the Commissioner, in his wisdom -- for what purpose I don't know -- decided that he would take this out of everybody's budget, and so he did it the first year, just those of us -- not the whole State, not all 600 school districts -- who had to ask for this. The Legislature came to the rescue after the hue and cry of concern and passed a law, which we thought solved the problem, which said basically the Commissioner can't do this anymore unless he specifically does



it and says it's unsafe in some districts. We thought that solved the problem. No. He went right ahead and did it last year again.

And now, with what Senator Schluter has come up with-- We're a regional district with three municipalities. Our three mayors asked for a meeting with the Senator and with myself to work this out. And we came up with a very simple bill that returns the status quo. There's *A*, *B*, and *C*. *A* says you can go ahead and do basically what you used to do before, but there's a little more restriction, you have to have a public hearing and tell people specifically that you're doing this and you may consult with you Chief of Police.

But *B* is the important part, on the second page of the bill, where it stops the Commissioner from interfering with a process that's worked perfectly fine for years until he decided for some purpose that he would do this. What this bill does is address his purpose. Because he says this is a non-T&E expenditure, and that's the way in which he ignored the bill that the Legislature adopted and the way in which he imposed himself on this process.

Senator Schluter's bill very simply says, "The provision of safety busing under this act shall be deemed to be required for a thorough and efficient education, and the cost of busing shall be exempt from the calculation of the budget cap of the school district." It solves our problem. It solves everybody's problem. It's very simple.

We're not asking for any money. We want to continue, you know, if the local board, with the advice of the local community, thinks that this expenditure is justified, we put it in our budget. We pay for it 100 percent for ourself. It's a very simple process. There was no need for the Commissioner



to do that. And he should have butted out after the first year when the Legislature wrote the bill.

This one was expressly written to make his interference in this process to cut it out, so it can't happen anymore. Now, this hopefully won't be a problem for us in the future, because we happen to spend 10 percent less than the average district. We have a top school district. The only one who has higher scores in Mercer County is West Windsor. We're a fine school district, but we have a tight community. We spend about 10 percent less than the average.

Hopefully, with the new bill to substitute for S-40 that's going through, this kind of scrutiny by the Commissioner won't be there. It may be there for the special education cap -- and woe to those -- but it won't be here for the general construction. However, there will be some other school districts, and that's why I think you should support Senator Schluter's statement. Just simply pass this and say it can't be declared non-T&E expenditure. Let the local board pay for it if they think they need it.

Because those school districts as you know in the substitute bill that are outside the box, below the box, they automatically, if they lose, have to go before the Commissioner. And don't you think the Commissioner's going to say, "Take this out, it's not a thorough and efficient education"? Then you're going to have this problem for all those school districts or any district that's within the box, which is where we are. We won't have to, because our three municipalities will never take this money out. It's just an unnecessary harassment that's been created on local school districts.



We're a regional school district. Our expenses are divided up pretty much on a per head or per dollar basis. Our three municipalities went ahead-- We had \$60,000, we had to do for this. They went ahead in both years paid for a majority of it. But they had to have a public hearing and say, "Well, is this necessary or not?" They had to go through-- Citizens had to come in all three municipalities. When they got through, they funded 50-some thousand of the 60. It came to the local taxpayer the same as it would if we put it in our budget. It was just nonsense.

Then after they've scrutinized it and found a few places where they thought, "Well, that highway's not fast enough," or "That intersection's not bad enough," they said, "Okay, we're not going to fund that." They had to be a little parsimonious with the taxpayers money. Then we had to write all those parents and tell them beforehand, "Well, you may not have -- we can't do it." And then afterwards we had to say, "Well, now the municipalities didn't do it. If you think that's unsafe, you're going to have to come over and pay us, and we'll accept your check right up until school starts, because we want your child to be bused. We think it's our responsibility. We'd do it if the Commissioner would stay out of this or if the Legislature would pass a bill to give us back the authority."

I think it's a simple bill, and it'll solve the problem. I urge you to consider what the Senator said.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Well, we thank you very much for coming to testify before us and share you ideas.

DR. THOMAS: Thank you. I have a resolution our board adopted which I'll leave with your staff.



ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: All right.

Thank you, Senator Schluter.

We're not here to either defend or castigate the Commissioner. We did meet with him this morning, and I think one of the things we learned that everything that the Commissioner mandates is not always something that he-- He does it based on some of the counsel that he receives. So we're working with him very closely, and he's offered to assist us, as I mentioned in my opening remarks.

We will move on. The next two people who I'm going to call up are both from Monroe Township here in District 14.

Ellen Milionis and Danielle Miller. Are either of them here?

**DANIELLE MILLER:** (speaking from audience) I'm Danielle Miller.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Would you come forward, please?

Danielle, please proceed. Introduce yourself, please, for the record as well.

MS. MILLER: Hi. I'm Danielle Miller from Monroe Township. I'm here today because this involves my children. I'm a resident of the Heritage Chase Development on Route 522. My husband and I are deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of the elementary schoolchildren that will be affected by this Courtesy Busing legislation.

Both of the schools are within two miles of my development. The speed limit on the road, which is called Route 522 -- Jamesburg Road -- is 50 mph. I went to the Monroe Township Police Department last week. In the



past two years within a two-mile stretch of this Route 522, from Mounts Mill Road to Grace Hill Road, there have been 75 accidents. There have been two fatalities and 26 injuries reported this year.

This is a route that the children would have to walk to the school. There's no sidewalks. There's no guardrails. The speed limit is 50 mph. In front of the school, it's 45 mph.

It's just incomprehensible that if this gets passed that children in first grade would have to walk two miles to school on a major road from one town. To get to the Turnpike, it's the major cut-through road.

That's about it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Well, we certainly want to thank you for coming to testify because it was people in the community that we really were eager to meet at these hearings. So that's one of the reasons you called, and we wanted to put you up first.

MS. MILLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: We'll move right along then.

We have another local person from Jamesburg, Donna Saieva. Is she here? Oh, good. You'll have to say your name for us again. Donna is from Jamesburg. Introduce yourself for the record since they're recording the testimony. We had asked people to keep their oral comments to five minutes, but you can submit anything you wish to the written record.

**D O N N A   S A I E V A:** Okay. My name is Donna Saieva. I live at 6 Regent Drive, Jamesburg, New Jersey. It's in Monroe Township.

I also am extremely concerned about how the State proposal to eliminate courtesy busing will affect children in Monroe Township. As



Danielle was just speaking, I have the same concerns. The road is a major route. There are no shoulders. There are no guardrails. If you look at the signs, the signs say 50 mph, 45 mph by the schools. It is quite a distance for young children if you think about them walking that route to school. There are at least two intersections coming from the direction where we live along Schoolhouse Road. The children would also have to cross a railroad crossing, which also does not have a guardrail or a crossing stick there.

I just believe it's just so extremely dangerous to make a proposal of that nature that, I think, an amendment needs to be made to address hazardous busing. And then a need for hazardous busing, particularly in communities that are unique like this, where it's not so suburban that a child can walk to school-- There are neighbors, and you know, if something happened, they can walk up to a neighbor's house. This is a main road with not much else out there. You really have to see pictures of it. I think you live in the area.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: We're right in a neighborhood that's similar.

MS. SAIEVA: So you know what we're talking about. Also one other thing I wanted to mention: There are some children in the community that have special needs. They may be hearing impaired, visually impaired, or neurologically impaired. Those families can petition the school for special transportation. Again, that would go right into the same developments where all our children who need busing would wind up going into. So I think you need to take into consideration those needs as well.



ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Good. We certainly thank you for coming to testify. We'll look forward to being in touch with you further as we move through the hearings.

Thank you, Donna.

MS. SAIEVA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Assemblywoman?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Yes, I'm sorry.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: May I just make a comment with regard--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: I just wanted to comment on the last witness' testimony that indeed, even in well-established neighborhoods, the so-called safe havens are no longer available, because lifestyles have changed such that those homes which were populated by stay-at-home moms or whomever, grandmothers -- they simply aren't there. Lifestyles have changed. So I have the concern as well in communities that aren't as unique as yours as you described. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Next we have South Brunswick officials. We have Dr. Sam Stewart, the Superintendent.

And also, is Captain Fred Thompson here? Oh, hi Fred. I'm sorry. Good. We'll bring you up together. We'll ask Dr. Stewart to start if that's all right, and then we'll ask Captain Thompson to continue.

**SAMUEL B. STEWART, Ed.D.:** I want to just say as a beginning that when I was in elementary school I walked two miles -- over two miles -- to catch a bus to go to school, and I walked through two miles of cornfields and



cow pastures. That's not what the children in South Brunswick are facing today. So what we want to do is talk about the nature of our community, share some safety concerns with you, and talk about costs. We see the transportation issue as part of our total budget, so we want to talk about our total costs. And finally, I know that you're focusing on safety busing, but I also know you're about to make significant decisions about total financing, so naturally I want to say a little something about that.

Let me introduce some people who may be helping us. First of all, Jeff Scott is our Business Administrator in South Brunswick. John Longo is our Director of Operations, and Sandy Kowalsky is head of transportation. So they're going to be helping us as well.

Now, when we talk about the nature of South Brunswick, there are two or three things that come to mind. The first is growth. In 1960 when our current high school was built, we had 10,000 people who lived here in the 42 square miles. And incidently this map (referring to map on wall) also shows our elementary school districts, and we're going to use that in just a minute. Today we have a population of somewhere of over 30,000, 32,000, 33,000, or 34,000 people. We're growing at a rate of about 1000 people a year, and about a third of those people are in our schools.

Our schools as a matter of fact-- Our school enrollment has grown by 45 percent since '91-'92. Our budget has increased during that time at some 26 percent. We received our new State-audited figures that are part of our report card that will be going to the community. They show that our comparative costs are \$6899 versus a State average of \$7759. And then they show a total cost, which includes the cost of buildings and transportation, of



\$7773 for South Brunswick versus the State average of \$8849. Our total current enrollment as of today is 5864. We bus almost 90 percent of our students in this township. And 42 percent of those we bus are in the nonremote category of the Commissioner -- 42 percent of all those that we bus.

Now, last year, our community voted \$604,000 for safety busing as a separate item. And 64 percent of the people in this community voted yes -- 64 percent of those people who were voting voted yes. We also had \$34,500, part of that \$604,000, for late buses around our high school and our middle school. We run a bus at 4:00 and at 5:00 and at 6:00. I think the community should understand that we think and we know there's a need to expand that. And 20 percent to 25 percent of all of our elementary children are with us in the morning and after school. We have a before and after-school program that starts at 7:00 and ends at 6:00. Almost 900 students are enrolled in that program.

Now, let me turn to the cost of busing just for a minute. Let me go to safety issues first of all on our map. Let me show you a situation where students, according to the law today, would have to walk and yet we'll explain the hazard. Let's go to Brunswick Acres first of all. This is the Brunswick Acres Elementary School District. And that little road going right through there is Route 1 where 40,000 cars go up and down on a daily average. According to the State law that would be okay for those kids to go to school.

Let me show you another area called Five Corners. We have a brand new school. Some of you in here and I know the Commissioner's been



to this school, as has the Governor. We bus almost all of the kids who go to that school. One of the reasons--

Sandy, would you just describe the Five Corners section.

**S A N D Y   K O W A L S K Y:** Okay. It is called Five Corners because, basically, it's crossed by five major roads -- tremendous, tremendous truck traffic, traffic that crosses from Route 130 to Route 1 from the Cranbury area going all the way up to the East Brunswick and the North Brunswick area. There is no way that I would feel safe stepping off the curb over there, and yet we would require our children to do that.

**DR. STEWART:** In Kendall Park, which is our oldest residential area, I think the development started somewhere in '57 or '58. When we went before our community last year to talk about safety busing even in that area, one of the senior members of this community, a former mayor, stood up and said, "Look, my children used to walk to school in those neighborhoods, but the traffic wasn't as heavy. The area wasn't as congested. The safety hazards were not as real as they are today." And she was very instrumental in helping us to get the community to pass that.

Thank you, Sandy.

Let me turn to cost quickly. Our total annual cost per student for all the busing we do including special ed is \$507 per child. According to the State report, the State average is \$961 a child. Now, for our regular students, including the nonremote, it's \$255 a child. Our nonpublic, or private schools, \$440 a child. And we have 23 special ed children whose out-of-district cost is \$10,600 per child. But I wanted you to have those cost figures as you think about this.



And now let me ask Captain Thompson to talk about South Brunswick from his perspective.

**CAPTAIN FREDERICK THOMPSON:** Thank you, Dr. Stewart.

Good afternoon, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Please introduce yourself again for the record, Captain Thompson.

CAPTAIN THOMPSON: Fine, thank you. My name is Frederick Thompson, and I'm a Captain with the South Brunswick Police Department. I'm representing my Chief today, Chief Michael Paquette, who unfortunately is out with the flu.

My testimony today addresses the issue of nonmandatory busing as it relates to safety, specifically pedestrian safety, namely our children in South Brunswick as they walk to and from school.

As you study courtesy busing as a Task Force, I strongly urge that you consider variables which have a significant impact on the childrens safety which are not necessarily accounted for under the current 2-mile and 2.5-mile courtesy busing definition.

As Dr. Stewart stated, South Brunswick is a rapidly growing community. On the average, we experience an increase of growth of approximately 1000 residents per year. It is relatively a young community with a large influx of children.

Our community is located directly between two metropolitan areas, New York City and Philadelphia; therefore, the roadway infrastructure reflects this geographic location. It includes major highways, highways such as



Route 27, Route 1, Route 130, Route 522, Route 535, and Interchange 8A of the New Jersey Turnpike. All these highways are supported by major feeder roads which transverse our neighborhoods.

It's a very important point in this particular discussion. Not only would I ask the Task Force to focus in on communities with major highways, but each and every one of those highways has to be supported by major feeder roads. These feeder roads transverse directly through our neighborhoods.

I'd like to give you some statistics on the type of traffic that we experience on our highways. These are results of traffic counts that are performed by the New Jersey Department of Transportation. They are going to indicate increases in traffic volume within our community spanning over, say, the last past three years. The source for this information is the Data Resource Division of the New Jersey Department of Transportation. These are daily numbers and daily traffic volumes.

The first one I'd like to give was taken on the south end of our township -- the south border of Route 1 -- in the area of the Route 1 College Road for the year 1992, both north and south on the highway. On the daily rate, the volume of traffic on that highway is 36,700 vehicles in 1992. In 1994, the last count that was taken by the State, it was 41,300, which is an increase of 12 percent.

On Route 27 and Henderson Road -- another major roadway in our community -- both north and south figures, on a daily basis in 1992, 21,110; in 1993, 23,580, 11 percent increase. Route 27 and Beekman Road, including both north and south, in 1993, 18,420; in 1994, 20,390, a 10 percent increase. As you can see by these numbers, if you look at the average



of all those years, we're experiencing on these major roadways approximately 11 percent increase in traffic volume. They're 1994 numbers. If you were to extrapolate those out, you'd get an idea of what we're experiencing in 1996.

To even exemplify the impact of traffic even further within our community, approximately 50 percent of all of my agency's activities are traffic related. That's an incredible amount of workforce hours dedicated just to traffic-related issues in this community.

South Brunswick Township has nine public schools, one parochial school within its boundaries. The schools are spread throughout our community. Many children living within a 2-mile or 2.5-mile radius have to cross major highways and major feeder roads to arrive at their school. Regardless of sidewalk availability, children having to cross major roadways would present a serious safety issue.

I ask this Task Force to consider a township such as ours, which has major highways crisscrossing through the community causing hazardous walking conditions for children within a 2-mile or 2.5-mile range.

Thank you.

DR. STEWART: Let me just close on this and say that in the effort to define education or the State's responsibility for education, as instruction in the classroom in certain content areas, that is in conflict with what schools have been doing in South Brunswick and other places. In order to get the community to support this, we had to go out and say to the community, "What has been traditional here, we need your vote to help us keep." So wherever you place that responsibility for the busing, it has to be done, and it has to be part of this community.



Let me just close then and say a couple of other words about the State aid picture. We're looking at a growth next year of 550 students. We graduated 290 last year, and we're expecting 600 kindergartners in South Brunswick. And of all of the people who live in this town, the over 30,000 people, almost half of those people are between the ages of 20 and 45. So it's a young community with many, many children. Next year, we're opening a new high school. The utility bill for that we estimate to be \$600,000. Incidentally, our total new in money last year from our budget was \$1.8 million. So the high alone for utilities is \$600,000. We also have to have a new five to six school. The core staff of that, the principal, the librarians, nurse, teachers, just the core staff for that school is \$1 million.

So if we're faced with a 3 percent budget, we just can't cope.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you very much, Dr. Stewart and Captain Thompson. We appreciate your guidance on this issue, and I know we'll be perhaps back in touch with you regarding these issues.

Next we have Mayor Janice Mironov from East Windsor.

**MAYOR JANICE S. MIRONOV:** Thank you.

Chairperson Assemblywoman Wright and members of the Committee (*sic*), we appreciate this opportunity to come before you. We appreciate your openness in conducting these hearings around the State. I do want to note that we do have in the audience one of our very active parents in this issue which I will also, as Senator Schluter did, call safety busing, because we also believe this has become no longer courtesy. And I also anticipate a representative from our school administration to be here prior to the end of your hearings today.



I'm here today both on behalf of myself and also to express the sentiment that has already been expressed unanimously by the members of the East Windsor Township Council asking our State officials and State legislators to immediately enact revisions in the State school busing limits criteria and funding so as to create a fairer and more responsible busing system to protect the safety of our schoolchildren. Residents and local officials are all deeply concerned about the safety of our children getting to and from school and the lack of appropriate concern, involvement, and action to date by the State administration and the State Legislature.

This State administration, as has been pointed out, has gone so far as to illogically direct that the safe passage of our children to and from school is unrelated to their obtaining a proper education by arbitrarily removing moneys for this purpose from school district budgets throughout the State. Through this action, State officials and the State Commissioner of Education have attempted to purposely or inadvertently dump yet another cost issue on municipal governments and/or local parent and property taxpayers.

I want to make some observations specifically about our town not covered by the existing State-mandated guidelines for busing, that is, the 2-mile and the 2.5-mile limits. Well over 400 elementary school-age children and over 100 high school students in East Windsor Township must cross State Highway 130, which runs through the center of our town, to get to school. Another group of first through fifth grade schoolchildren must walk across or along State Highway Route 33, pass the New Jersey Turnpike Exit 8 to get to school each day.



The State needs to accept responsibility for the hazardous roadway conditions it has created through these State roads and over which the State has exclusive control. In the past, the State has been involved in increasing tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike diverting ever-increasing numbers of cars and trucks onto Route 130, and now is proposing the expansion of Route 130 to six lanes right through the center of our town and surrounding towns but has taken no steps whatsoever to address pedestrian safety. No plans for overpasses, no sidewalks; no plans for the safety of schoolchildren, and no thought at all to pedestrian issues on State highways.

The fact is that times and conditions have changed dramatically since the passage of current busing guidelines with the expansion and construction of additional highways, increased automobile and truck traffic, greater crime concern, and many more working mothers. What was good 25 years ago is not necessarily good today.

The State's existing busing reimbursable guidelines were developed in the potato farm days of East Windsor and other communities. They are archaic and need to be revisited.

On July 23 of this year, in 1996, the East Windsor Township Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling for revisions in the school busing limits criteria and funding and forwarded that resolution to our State legislators and to towns and school boards throughout the State. I would note that we have received back a tremendous demonstration of support from other public bodies throughout Mercer County and Middlesex County and throughout the State of New Jersey.



Further, at the initiation of East Windsor Township and with the support of Plainsboro Township, at their annual conference the week of November 19, the New Jersey League of Municipalities has joined us in support of our resolution and requesting the State Legislature for revisions in the school busing funding system.

Local legislators must get the message that residents and local officials want changes and, most importantly, that we want them now. Among some of the legislative steps which I would ask you to consider taking are the following:

- 1) The State needs to review and enact revisions in the State's school busing limits criteria and funding so as to overall create a more fairer and responsible busing system for the safety of our schoolchildren.

- 2) The State should reimburse school districts for schoolchildren who must walk along or across State highways to get to school. This is an area that is clearly definable. One that clearly is a State responsibility and over which the State has exclusive control and would provide property tax relief to our home owners.

- 3) The State should deem that the busing of schoolchildrenren along hazardous routes to and from school is necessary for a thorough and efficient system of education. In this manner, the school districts would be permitted to budget funds for additional categories of hazardous busing, and it would become an item that could not be removed from the school budget.

- 4) It is important that the above legislative changes be enacted expeditiously so that funding changes for school busing are in place for the next school year, which begins as July 1, and prior to the finalization of local



school budgets. I understand that school budgets are required to be filed during the first week in March so that time is really very brief to put into place some of these steps that have just been outlined immediately.

5) The State and local school boards should jointly undertake and continue to review methods by which savings can reasonably and feasibly be affected in transportation costs. But this overall review and action should not hold up the much needed immediate steps outlined above to provide and to correct and to provide safety busing for children who must walk along hazardous routes and correct the actions which have been taken to date by the State Commissioner of Education.

The State has a responsibility to support local education and getting our children to school safely clearly is one of the necessary costs of that endeavor. The status quo puts children at great risk on a daily basis. Hopefully, the State will not continue to shirk its responsibility, especially when young lives are at stake.

We appreciate the opportunity to be before you today. You may hear further from our town. We look forward to tangible steps being taken by your body and being taken very soon and in a very timely fashion.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Mayor. We appreciate your coming and sharing with us, and we will be working with you closely.

MAYOR MIRONOV: Great. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I noticed that we have on our desks Suzanne Caravella's letter to us. This will be submitted for the record.



Anything you would like to submit, if you would just give it to Mr. O'Brien. We really appreciate the efforts that you've put forward in drafting this letter to us and also sharing some of your photos. Oh good, you have written testimony as well.

Before I go on, I just noticed that I missed the boat here for a minute. Kathy Leonard was also a parent from Monroe. Did Kathy come in? I should have brought you up with Danielle when we didn't have Ellen, so would you testify, and then we'll move on to the other testimony.

Kathy Leonard, and just introduce yourself again.

**KATHY LEONARD:** I'm Kathy Leonard from Monroe Township.

I'm appearing before you this afternoon to express my concerns regarding the issue of courtesy busing. I'm a parent of two young children. One receives courtesy busing. I'm presently in my first year as a member of the Monroe Township Board of Education and serve as a member of its transportation committee. Today I'm speaking before you not as their representative, but as a parent who's become aware of this problem. Several townships near Monroe have faced the problem of funding courtesy busing.

In my investigations, I found that the New Jersey Administrative Code states that students who reside more 2.5 miles to high school or 2 miles from elementary school are eligible for transportation. This distance must be measured by the shortest route along public roadways or public walkways. Any transportation provided for lesser distances is considered courtesy transportation. The Code doesn't address the fact that some students within these zones may be put at risk if they were made to walk.



With this information, I looked around the township to see under what conditions the students would be required to walk if Monroe was forced to discontinue hazardous busing. I've broken down courtesy busing into a subset that I call hazardous busing. It consists of all busing done outside the Code guidelines that is done to ensure the students don't become roadkill on their way to school.

I looked at my daughter's route first. She would need to walk along a county highway that has no sidewalks. I also found this to be true at two other elementary schools in the township. Both Barkley Brook and Brookside Schools are on County Route 522. The speed limit in front of the schools is 45 mph. In front of a major development containing approximately 70 school-age children, the speed limit increases to 50 mph. Is the solution to lower the speed limit? That might cut down on the many accidents this stretch of road has seen over the years, but that wouldn't make it safe for the children to walk. The road is two lanes wide with little or no shoulder. In some places, a ditch runs along the side of the road. The only place for children to walk would be in the street, possible maybe in nice weather, but with snow cover never. Would you let your child walk on a road like that?

The Monroe Township Board of Education realizes that some children can't safely walk to school because of road conditions, and they have developed a hazardous eligibility criteria. The formula they developed to establish hazardous walking routes is in your written copy.

We all want the same thing. We want to see the children get to school safely, and we want to see the cost of busing go down. I would like to see a bill drafted that establishes a distance requirement for busing, like we



already have, a hazardous eligibility criteria similar to the one above, and a provision to provide courtesy busing at a fee for working parents or anyone who desires this service.

First, I would like to explain what I would like to see in the hazardous eligibility criteria. The criteria I described is one example. The school districts and the police departments should work together to establish a uniform criteria that would apply across the State. The part I would like to see added to the above criteria is: Once a road has been named hazardous, I would like an engineer to study the road and work out a plan of improvement that would allow the designation to be removed. This plan should be given to the municipalities for implementation. Roads with less severe conditions should be addressed first, and the municipalities should be given some time to implement the changes. Roads that need more work should be worked on next, and the municipalities should be given more time to complete the work. That way roads that were once hazardous would become safe and the students could walk. Over time the amount of hazardous busing would decrease. Parents would then have the option of paying for courtesy busing or letting their children walk safely to school.

Right now the Monroe Township Board of Education determines hazardous routes. With a statewide criteria, any potential parental pressure would be removed from the boards of education. The State should appoint a county or independent engineer to complete the studies and apply the criteria. The engineer should be required to do any road studies during the times children would be walking to or from school. The character of some roads changes greatly depending on the time of day.



In addition, I would like to express my displeasure at one proposed bill that is still in committee. The bill would establish a countywide transportation coordinator. The coordinator would establish a school calendar, opening and closing times, and snow days, to name just a few responsibilities. It would also abolish all courtesy busing. One, establishing a new level of bureaucracy will only increase costs. Two, while as a board member I don't like the loss of local control this would bring, I could live with it. Three, Monroe has historically cleaned its streets of snow cover before other municipalities. Would Monroe's children sit home with safe streets or would other children be forced onto unsafe streets? What would happen if an ice condition develops in one area? Would everyone stay home? Four, abolishing courtesy busing would save money, but the cost is too high. An injury or death is too steep a price to pay. There must be provisions for hazardous busing.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Kathy, thank you very much for coming in. We note that you are a member of your school board, and we're grateful to hear from you as well. Thank you so much.

Next, I would call Gerry Schaller, the Assistant Superintendent in the West Windsor-Plainsboro School District.

**GERARD SCHALLER:** Thank you.

Assemblywoman Barbara Wright and members of the Task Force, my name is Gerard Schaller. I'm an Assistant Superintendent of Schools within the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District located in Princeton Junction, New Jersey. First, allow me to express my sincere



appreciation for this opportunity to express the district's concerns pertaining to courtesy busing.

What is being done to see that children in West Windsor and Plainsboro Townships travel to and from school safely? Every parent, every school board member, every school principal, and every township leader is most concerned about the safety of children. That's probably not news. But what is important is that they are committed to working together to make things work for kids.

No one likes the situation our defeated school budget has put us in. We can't change the outcome of the last election, but we can and will make the best of options that remain. It is most unfortunate that many voters were not aware of or were misinformed that what would happen to courtesy busing if the school budget was defeated.

Parents don't like the situation they face one bit. Those whose children no longer receive school bus transportation have every right to be angry. There are roads in our communities where it is absolutely unsafe under any circumstances for children to walk. But for some parents, the choice was to pay a fee for service, drive their children to school, or allow their children to walk and be at risk. Among these choices there is little choice at all.

The West Windsor-Plainsboro School District is characterized by narrow roads, high-speed traffic, high-volume traffic, and a lack of sidewalks, all of which jeopardize the safety of nearly 1800 children whose school bus transportation has been taken away by an ill-conceived new policy of the Department of Education.



So important is this service that the parents of these children are paying for it rather than see it lost. It costs a family in West Windsor with three children \$975, which equates to \$325 per child, a figure which represents the actual cost of transportation. While in Plainsboro Township, the Town Committee has subsidized the service to make it more affordable.

It was suggested that car pools and crossing guards would be possible solutions, but our experience proves these measures to be inadequate. Schools, such as the Dutch Neck Elementary School, which may have 400 additional children being driven by parents, were not designed to safely or efficiently handle a high volume of car traffic.

Traffic studies show that the peak for accidents is the rush hour. The same time that our children will be walking in conditions that are inherently hazardous. Also, West Windsor Township has been unable to fill the few crossing guard positions it's had in its budget for years. How can it fill the 13 positions needed to safely guide these students who once were bused to school?

The only real solution is to recognize school bus transportation in statute and so vital as to be necessary for a thorough and efficient education. It has been suggested that the school district consult with local, county, and/or State transportation officials to construct a definition of what constitutes unsafe conditions. The district has begun such discussions, and it is very clear that this approach is not likely to yield the common definition that was suggested. Further, the district has conferred with the Director of the Office of Highway and Traffic Safety, Department of Law and Public Safety, and both Chiefs of Police within our townships to assist with this dilemma. We



further discussed this matter with the Director of Pupil Transportation for the Department of Education who previously attempted to develop State guidelines for determining unsafe conditions that would require school bus service and concluded that it was not possible to do so.

The conditions in different parts of the State, differences between urban, suburban, and rural, differences due to population density -- all these variations defy the one-size-fits-all approach preferred by State decision makers. There are communities in New Jersey where it is not safe for a child to walk a block and in other communities where children can walk great distances on country roads without undue risk.

Guidelines for student transportation made necessary by unsafe conditions in communities like West Windsor and Plainsboro have been recommended by Superintendent of Schools Ray Bandlow, and I quote him: "When hazardous conditions exist that imperil the safety of schoolchildren, the Board of Education should be required to provide school bus transportation. Hazardous conditions minimally include the absence of sidewalks on at least one side of the roadway on State and county highways, and having to cross a State or county road or local road with heavy traffic unprotected by a stop sign, traffic signal, or a crossing guard."

Furthermore, the distances from home to school in current statute are out of date. For example, under statute, a five-year-old child could be required to walk almost two miles, a distance that is unsafe for any child under any conditions. To be eligible for bus transportation, a student in K through eight must live more than two miles from school, and a high school student must live more than 2.5 miles. Sadly, these considerable distances do not take



into account the dangers for children that are all too common in today's society.

A more reasonable and realistic distance requirement would be that which our school district followed prior to our present circumstances: 0.5 mile for kindergarten children, 1 mile for children in Grades 1 through 8, and 1.5 mile for high schoolers.

Determining hazardous conditions is a function of both distance and such factors as stated. After talking with State and local agencies, the school district has come to believe that the answer is to identify the process rather to define conditions. The statute could be amended to allow for busing where a local school board and the municipal governing body, in consultation with a State agency, jointly agree that conditions are hazardous. Requiring two independent entities to concur would lend integrity to the process, and including an outside agency for consultation would add a dimension of standards. The thrust of this process is a responsible local evaluation of local conditions. Something that the State standards alone cannot provide.

Governor Whitman has stated her support for problem solving at the local level. This proposal is completely consistent with that direction.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address the group.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Gerry. Did you submit copies? Okay. I just realized I received a copy in my office, and thank you for sharing those.

May I ask John Henderson, from the New Jersey School Boards Association, to please come forward.



**JOHN HENDERSON:** Thank you, Chairman Wright for the opportunity to speak today.

The School Boards Association has been engaged with this issue for 15 years now, as long as I've been at the Association, probably longer than that. We already had policy at that time. The issue has eluded definition and solution for that long. What really excites us is that the issue has finally achieved a critical mass that, indeed, an Assembly Task Force was created to deal with it. So it looks like it will be dealt with, and to that end the School Boards Association wants to be at every one of these meetings and to be a loyal supporter of this effort.

One of the things that we think we can do for you is to share with you some important background information that I think will help you solve this incredibly difficult problem. This morning you had expressed some interest in the Commissioner's testimony concerning how busing started and the legalities. I have four handouts, a couple of which you may have, but I think you'll find them useful in this context.

The question arose early today about whether transportation in the State was a matter of access or safety, and the Commissioner answered that it was access and suggested that it could be changed to safety. I think Assemblyman Malone made a very strong suggestion that it be changed to include safety. But the status quo as it is now is that it is merely access.

The first handout, "Chronology of Court and Commissioner Decisions and Legislative Action Relevant to the Issue of Courtesy Busing," is a legal history of courtesy busing in New Jersey. As I was telling Assemblywoman Buono this morning, the first busing case did not involve a



school bus. It was a court order to take a farmer's child from 3.5 miles away on a cart. If you look at the top of Page 2 of that, you can see the very first busing issue on this chronology page. The back of Page 1 details for you that a judge ordered the school district to get the kid there, because he lived too far away from the building.

In other words, it was an issue of discrimination. Busing started in this State as an issue of discrimination -- distance away from the building. It never historically had anything to do with safety.

The rest of the handouts catalogs for you -- and I think you'll find this handy as you go forward -- is a series of legal cases that declares the towns responsibility. And again, I'm not suggesting at this point in our testimony that that's appropriate nor that you should change it. It's just what is. And that's that handout.

I want to finally conclude-- And I rushed up here hoping to see Assemblyman Azzolina, who I call the godfather of courtesy busing, because he thought and his staff thought he had pretty much addressed this and maybe even solved this two years ago when he got the last three bills on your page passed. The last three bills on your page on this handout are the Azzolina package. I'm sure he is aggravated, I imagine. I wanted to ask him today that it isn't solved, that it isn't solved. His three bills went right at courtesy busing. They tried to deal with it. The best one needs what I call the Buono amendment to it, because the best one has the Transportation Commissioner only spending the \$100 million out of the Transportation Trust Fund on safety issues, getting children to school first. The final version of that bill didn't get there. It got amended out. Assemblywoman Buono puts the language back



into that bill mandating that the Commissioner of Transportation first prioritize that \$100 million to go to getting children to school safely. So there will be no bridge built on the other side of town with Transportation Trust Funds unless it can be shown that there's a connection to getting the child to school more safely. So that's that handout.

The second handout is the chart that I know you've seen before. You've seen it replicated in the newspapers. This is the "Transportation Costs: Selected States," which is a summary of the Deloitte and Touche report. At the top you see New Jersey spending \$961, and then you see Connecticut almost \$400 cheaper -- more than \$400 cheaper. And then the third state on that chart is Massachusetts.

Assemblywoman Myers raised an important issue this morning. She said, "Well, let's look at Pennsylvania doing it for \$183." The chart's statistics have to be carefully explained, and this is part of the work that we want to offer to you. They didn't all report the same things. Pennsylvania does not have mandated transportation, nor does their special ed cost in here. So that's why the \$183. However, Connecticut and Massachusetts data is pure and Maryland data is very pure. Delaware data is pure. That is they work comparing apples to apples, and the answer is we spend \$400 more than those states.

South Carolina has 17-year-olds driving school buses who are making minimum wage. So that's why South Carolina is the cheapest in the nation. But again, for four states we claim the data. That's what I'm getting at. So that's that handout.



The next handout I draw your attention to because it confirms, Assemblywoman Wright, your observation this morning about how good West Windsor is. If you look at this chart, this is the one called State aid for pupil transportation under QEA funding, under S-40 funding and would be under the Littell Bill No. 1315. If you take a look at the -- and this is done sort of geographically -- and I call your attention to Column C. The first number is what the QEA formula kicks out for that town per child. So for Ramsey it's \$594, Teaneck \$735, and \$660 for Ridgewood. If we flip over to Assemblywoman Wright's town, on the next page, QEA only spits out \$359 for her. Given that they only get \$359 under QEA, they're doing a remarkably efficient job.

How do we prove that West Windsor is doing a remarkably efficient job? Well, if you look at what happens to them when A-20 passes -- my expected version of A-20 passes-- When A-20 passes, West Windsor -- assuming it's efficient, assuming it continues to do what it does -- it nets under Column H \$289,000, because West Windsor's multiplier goes from 250 to 280 and its special ed multiplier goes up. All that is catalogued for you in the notes that are below. It's kind of dry stuff, but there's a half a billion dollars involved here. There's half a billion dollars involved here, so it almost necessitates you taking your pencils out and sticking with the numbers, because there's enormous savings here. That's the theme I heard struck this morning, and it's the theme I hear struck here because to do things for courtesy busing -- the case is clear.

Who's going to argue the case after all this testimony with the parents? It just needs to be seen as part of a piece, as part of a whole. The



efficiencies have to be ground out in order to free up money to do the right thing by these people. Asking the State to pile on another \$100 million to the \$249 million it already gives, which is the \$249 million in State aid that it currently gives, is more money than the direct aid of 13 branches of this government. In other words, the Department of Defense, all the State aid grants for 13 cabinet level positions in this State don't come to \$249 million. To ask the State to layer on another \$100 million to deal with this is not a judicious request.

Final chart compares Maryland-- This was done at the request of Senator Littell for his bill. It has useful data here because on the back of this one-- This is "County versus Local District Based School Transportation." If you flip over, I just want to point out to you that we have updated the Deloitte and Touche numbers. We've updated the Deloitte and Touche numbers and made a very important distinction. If you look at the bottom cell on the back page, New Jersey's costs for mandated transportation are now up over \$1000, \$1041 per pupil compared to Maryland's \$484.

Now, if you slip down to the explanation of how we got there, you'll find that if we add the courtesy-bused children in there-- If we add in \$127,000 into the mandated, the per pupil drops to \$889 -- still incredibly high. One of the things that we found is, because courtesy busing does not involve special ed children and because they, by definition, live closer to the building, you can do this cheaper per pupil -- certainly than this -- but you can do it cheaper per pupil than even your regular transportation.



So that's my presentation for today. It's highly data oriented, but if there's any interpretation or any questions on the data that I could answer at this time, I would be happy to.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: The only request I would have, John, is whether or not the State aid of-- You included West Windsor-Plainsboro in the chart?

MR. HENDERSON: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Does the School Boards Association have that for all 600-and-umpteens school districts?

MR. HENDERSON: Your request today-- I want to say I've been active in grinding these numbers now for a year. Why I never thought of your question, I'm embarrassed. Joan Ponessa tells me she thought of it. Your question is the best question I think I've heard in years on this topic. I want per pupil per town.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Yes, per district.

MR. HENDERSON: Yes. And what you should expand that is, I want two columns. I want all the towns. I want regular in one column and special ed in another column, and I want a per pupil per town. That will be yet another handout. That would be very, very interesting data to have as you go forward, because efficiency envelops this whole discussion.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: You know that one of our serious concerns is solving problems that don't exist. In West Windsor-Plainsboro certainly the cost per student and also in East Windsor -- we have very moderate costs per students. So we don't have a lot of efficiency. (*sic*)



We will look forward to further hearing from you. If data is available, we'd be interested in your breakouts, because that's the kind of information we're interested in.

MR. HENDERSON: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I want to thank you very much for coming this morning as well as this afternoon. I know that all of the Task Force appreciates the kind of research that you're doing with us and sharing with us. So thank you, Mr. Henderson.

MR. HENDERSON: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I'd like to call Mary Ellen Procaccini who is with the New Jersey ALLIANCE of Catholic School Families and Supporters.

I noticed that Dr. Larry Thompson from Catholic Schools Diocese of Trenton has also joined us.

Would you like to come forward with Mary Ellen Procaccini and testify at this time? (affirmative response)

And then following them, I'm going to ask Iris Mariani, from the St. Raphael's School, to follow them. Will that be okay?

**MARY ELLEN PROCACCINI:** That's fine.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Would you like to go ahead then.

MS. PROCACCINI: That's excellent.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Please introduce yourself for the record.



MS. PROCACCINI: Good afternoon, Madame Chairwoman and members of the Assembly Task Force on Courtesy Busing. Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important issue which is the lifeblood of our nonpublic schools.

My name is Mary Ellen Procaccini, and I am here as a Coordinator for the New Jersey ALLIANCE of Catholic School Families and Supporters. In our recent mailing to all 120 members of the New Jersey State Legislature, we included our brochure which outlined our 1996-1997 agenda. Our No. 2 agenda item is transportation, and it states that our intention is to review non-public school transportation models, specifically busing, in order to provide greater availability and more efficient service. Since the enactment of the ALLIANCE in July, we have been actively involved in spearheading legislative activity on the State and local levels in order to reinstate or restore busing for all school families.

Many areas of our State experienced severe busing problems this year for its non-public school students, which in some cases have still left children without a safe means to get to school. In other cases, feasible plans have not been provided by the public school districts of residence since students are riding on their buses a total of 90 minutes each way. Lastly, in still other cases, transportation matters were eventually resolved favorably, but the goal of the ALLIANCE is to avoid these situations from occurring year after year.

I am here today representing many of the families of the 153,000 students that attend Catholic schools in our State. More specifically, I represent the families of the children in the Foxmoor area of Washington



Township who attend St. Gregory, the Great School in Hamilton Square; the families of the children in the Lindenwald and Stratford areas who attend St. Lawrence School in Lindenwald and St. Luke School in Stratford; and other non-public school families who had courtesy busing eliminated for this school year. Although our non-public school families are taxpayers and constituents and continue to save New Jerseyans a total of over \$1.4 billion annually, when local decisions are made which directly impact on the safety of its youngest residents, our non-public school students do not always fair well in the mix.

Courtesy busing was eliminated in Washington Township since the Pond Run Middle School opened this school year for children in Grades 6 through 8. Children in the densely populated Foxmoor Development could now walk to that school, thus eliminating the need for public school courtesy busing to Sharon School. However, the children who attend the local Catholic school -- their school of choice -- were without safety busing despite the fact that the Chief of Police in Washington Township advised the local school board that the area in question was a hazardous route since there are no sidewalks and children in Grades Kindergarten through 8th grade would have to pass through a congested strip mall en route to school. Despite active involvement on the part of parents and several school board meetings to address this issue, courtesy busing has not been restored here. As a taxpayer, constituent, and resident of Washington Township for 22 years, I am appalled at the total disregard for the township's most precious possessions.

Courtesy busing was also eliminated in the Lindenwald and Stratford areas because of severe overcrowding in the local public schools in those districts. For this reason, the non-public school students have been



forced off the buses even though the routes in the area are hazardous for all students. Why is the health and safety of non-public school students not as valuable as the health and safety of public school students?

We, therefore, believe that any legislation to address the problems associated with hazardous busing should contain equitable provisions for the transportation of non-public school pupils along hazardous routes.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Mrs. Procaccini.  
Dr. Thompson.

**L A R R Y   T H O M P S O N,   Ed.D.:** Good afternoon, Madame Chairwoman and members of the Task Force. It's a pleasure to be here on the Task Force on Courtesy Busing. My name is Dr. Larry Thompson. I'm Catholic Schools Superintendent for the Diocese of Trenton. That includes Monmouth, Ocean, Burlington, and Mercer Counties. We have 70 schools with 29,000 students, so we are somewhat spread out.

Courtesy busing has become a problem in our diocese in certain geographical areas. Mary Ellen alluded to some of those. The basic problem is the population growth and a lot of the development that is going on, creation of new housing and the location of new highways, and those kinds of things. I think you've heard a lot of testimony of how everyone is really concerned of what's best for the kids, what's best for the families. It doesn't matter if they attend public or non-public schools. What's important -- that I'm hearing -- is the safety and that there's access to busing.



Catholic schools are probably affected a little bit more because the Catholic school -- the elementary are part of a parish. Many people who go to the parish live within that two-mile area and therefore need transportation.

I would also like to say that we, as I said before, know that everyone is concerned about just plain safety and health and safety of citizens. Also realize that this is an error of fiscal accountability. We know that everyone is looking for ways to cut money to do things better. But what we're also asking you to look at is the equitable treatment, that all students are treated equitably in whether they are private or public -- whatever they are -- if it's a courtesy busing issue that we are able to participate as fully and as completely as other students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you very much, Dr. Thompson, and thank you for the copies.

I had asked Iris Mariani to please come forward. I actually have only two other names here. If you have intended to testify and have not signed up, there are sign-up forms on the table here. If you will bring them forward to Mr. O'Brien, if you have not signed up. The only two people that I have after Iris Mariani are Joan Ponessa, from Public Affairs Research Institute, and Al Brenner. So if you're not signed up, you certainly--

We had scheduled this hearing originally until 6:00. It may not take until 6:00, but we certainly will hear every one who wishes to testify this afternoon. Sometimes the members have evening meetings, and they must leave. But I'm here for the duration, and I see I have some other people who have joined me.

Please proceed and introduce yourself.



**I R I S   M A R I A N I:** My name is Iris Mariani, and I am the PTA President for St. Raphael's School in Trenton, with me today is Sister Rosemary Bucchi. She's the principal of St. Raphael's.

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT:** Would you like her to come forward?

**MS. MARIANI:** It's up to her.

She says no.

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT:** Okay.

**MS. MARIANI:** We want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to address you today. We are here representing not only our families, but all of the non-public school families in our State, particularly Mercer County who have been impacted dramatically by the elimination of busing.

When school started in September, around 41 of our students didn't have any bus transportation. After the parents called the school some of them got lost, but not all of them. As you may imagine, this situation is a source of great concern to administrators and parents because it may result in a significant number of students transferring from Catholic schools to public school in the future, which will increase the financial burdens on both the local taxpayers and our school district.

In Mercer County, many children have to walk along hazardous and unsafe roads and routes to get to their schools of choice. As Assemblywoman Turner has mentioned, getting students to school and back home safely should be a guaranteed right for every student in New Jersey's



Constitution. However, as we know, this is not the case, particularly for the non-public school students.

Guidelines for school transportation were set over 20 years ago when traffic patterns and safety conditions were rural here in New Jersey. Now those same guidelines are outdated with the influx of the population, the growing numbers of new housing developments, the increase in business establishments, and the traffic that whizzes by even along county roads. Busing guidelines should be set based on the safety of our children along these routes and not just strictly on my list requirement.

New Jersey needs to adopt a more commonsense approach toward safety busing. We feel that it should not arbitrarily be up to the district to decide whether or not to provide courtesy busing to non-public school students and feel that any legislation enacted by you, the legislators, should provide equitable for the safe transportation of all students whether they attend public, private or parochial schools.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Next, we have Joan Ponessa, from Public Affairs Research Institute.

**JOAN PONESSA:** Good afternoon. I'm Joan Ponessa. I'm the Director of Research at the Public Affairs Research Institute of New Jersey. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy analysis organization concerned with State and local issues. We are the only private research group in New Jersey that has undertaken work in the area of pupil transportation.



Since October of 1988, PARI has issued three policy reports on the topic. This morning the Commissioner pointed out that there were two private reports that had been issued. We are the private reports he's referring to. It was our report that first pointed out the discrepancy in load factors in Bergen County. The result of that work is the reason that the State commissioned Deloitte and Touche to do a bigger study.

You perhaps are familiar with the focus report that we did in 1993 analyzing the present school funding transportation formula. Because of our expertise, we're frequently called on by State, as well as national groups, to provide insight into these problems with transporting students.

I'm happy to have this opportunity to address you today, and I hope you will call on us in the future if you would like any further help. I had written out a testimony which I intended to give you, but after attending the meeting this morning, I became somewhat concerned and decided to redo everything that I was going to say.

One of my major concerns after listening to the discussion this morning was concerning your requests for information from the Department of Education, mainly the cost per student. This is a figure that we have been trying to get for a long time -- we've been trying to get on a district level. There's a difficulty in getting this piece of information because of the way the State breaks out the information that they request from school districts.

So I would like to remind you, when you're looking for information, that you specifically need some information break out, meaning break out by cost per regular student, the special education students, and you also need to break out by the private school student costs. You also need to



know whether the regular cost per student includes the courtesy busing, because the \$961 that's frequently quoted, depending on how it's reported -- those total figures do not always include the courtesy busing students. So I want you to be very careful about what type of information you're looking at.

The problem with the way the information is collected produces some very unusual totals. For instance, if you're looking at a district that doesn't do a lot of courtesy busing and they are a very small district, they may be transporting very few regular students. Their costs are primarily for the non-publics, which means that those students usually are transported greater distances and there aren't as many students on the bus. So their costs may be significantly higher. So there's a number of reasons why you really need all of these types of break outs or you simply can not come up with any conclusions as to the cost per student for a district.

In 1973 when we analyzed the State funding formula, one of our concerns was that there is some information that the Department no longer collects. And unfortunately, one of the reports that we did in 1988 discussing the funding formula at that point complained that the districts were required to submit an inordinate amount of information. I mean, it took them months to collect it all. The mileage for every single student to and from school, their address, etc.

We were the ones who complained about that. Instead of reacting in a logical, sensible way and collecting the basic information that a district would normally would have to provide such as the number of routes, the number of buses, the average distance per student, etc., the Department literally threw out all the information and now no longer even collects even the



number of routes or the number of buses. So they have to get that information from the districts.

So I'm suggesting to you that there may be a couple of areas that you will want to address as far as requirements for information. It might be necessary in some cases to put that in a bill so that the Department is required to collect that information in the future so that these calculations can be made.

I also was a little bit concerned about Mrs. Wright's comments about the break out by district, and when you said, "Well, maybe we just would need it by county."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I didn't say that.

MS. PONESSA: Maybe I misunderstood what you said about the county--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: No, I'm looking for district cost.

MS. PONESSA: --but this is one point that I want to make very clear that the county break out is of absolutely no significance to you whatsoever, because some districts don't even transport at all. So you certainly don't want to look at county totals.

I also want to point out that the Littell bill-- (indiscernible; tape malfunction) --two things for you to consider. Regionalizing, or sharing services, are certainly the way to go as far as pupil transportation is concerned. But in some cases, just sharing services is really not going to solve the problem, because the districts are so adverse to doing that. The way that it has to be administered, as far as transportation is concerned, almost costs more money when two districts have to get together and have to have administration from



both sides feeding into this. Regionalizing services may be scary to some school districts, but I want to point out to you that the reason the other states costs are so significantly less -- if you look at the break out that John has already given you -- is because they have such a few administrative organizations handling the situation.

The other issue, as far as the Littell bill is concerned, is the three tiers, the scheduling and the calendars. I think that you have to consider that when you're talking about regionalization, as well, is that the important savings would come from the scheduling, the same calendars-- If you think about and if you get the Department -- I don't think you can get them to do this, because I don't think they have the ability to do it-- But if you could look the tremendous cost that's incurred by districts paying bus drivers overtime to transport students to other school districts.

For instance, special ed students and the non-public students, because they are over the 180-day limit because the calendars are different-- That means if one district has vacation in the week before Easter and the one has it the week after, that whole extra week has to be paid. The salaries have to be paid to the bus drivers, because there is a crossover of the busing because of the various calendars. So I think there are certain things like that that you really have to keep in mind. These things cost a great amount of money.

You also talked this morning about the municipal responsibility. I was also very concerned about the discussion about municipalities running the bus routes. I think that if such a situation is created, you create more trouble and greater costs than it's worth. You have even more groups running



bus systems than you do now. I think there are certain things like that you want to consider.

I also think that when we talk about responsibility for hazardous routes and safety issues that it's very easy for all of us to stand back and to say that the important thing is to change the mileage or to make some changes in the law. Courtesy busing is perhaps the most classic policy issue that we deal with where the decisions rightly belong with the local government rather than the State government. I think when the State government starts legislating issues that only a local government can fully understand, you create incredible problems.

Let me give you an example. If you change the mileage requirement for the elementary schools to 1.5 on the State level, you still won't be addressing any of the problems of districts who have major highways running past their schools. You change the student age requirements that limits just the kindergartners. There's been suggestions in the past that you allow all kindergartners to be bused. That means that their siblings walk alone.

There are districts in the State of New Jersey, about 70 of them, that don't do any transporting of regular students. You change the mileage, and you're creating all kinds of problems for them. You also, by changing mileage requirements and changing State requirements, are interfering with some of the districts who have had desegregation efforts revolving around courtesy busing. So I think that changing State requirements is very detrimental in many respects. As you can see, one of the reasons you're here today is because of some of the changes that Commissioner Klagholz has made



as far as the cap is concerned. And when the State makes those requirements on local districts for changes, the response is always major problems.

So I'd like to encourage you to consider the fact that courtesy busing can be a very local issue. That doesn't mean that there aren't ways to get around this. I think that the tremendous saving that is out there with pupil transportation, if it was addressed properly, is something that you will want to consider. You also should realize that courtesy busing is usually much cheaper than regular busing. Those students live closer and frequently can fill in half-empty buses. So anytime I've done any consulting work with districts where they try to cut back you can't cut out half the students, you cut half the buses. It doesn't work that way. Courtesy busing really is not as expensive as the other busing.

These are just a couple of my thoughts. I'd like to encourage you to call on some of us who have done some work in this area, and I wish you a lot of luck, because I think you're doing a great thing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: We want to thank you for testifying. Before you leave, I just want to point out with regard to the reports that you have completed, if there are those you think would be relevant to this particular Task Force, can Mr. O'Brien work with you to get copies for the members of the Task Force?

MS. PONESSA: I think Mrs. Myers called last week.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay, good, all right. If there are any others, we certainly would be happy to have you assist us. I want to thank you very much for sitting in with us this morning, as well as testifying this afternoon. I'm sure you're going to be very helpful. Thank you so much.



Our next witness is Al Brenner. Is Al Brenner here? (no response)

The next person I will call is Mr. Jurkanski, from the Lakewood School. Would you please introduce yourself?

**R A B B I C H A I M J U R K A N S K I:** Yes. Good afternoon. My name is Rabbi Jurkanski. I'm one of the administrators of the Lakewood Cheder School. As you know, we are the school a week and a half ago one of our children was run over by a school bus. Okay, that was our personal bus. We have two of our private buses and had all the safety equipment on it. And yet we had that terrible tragedy.

I'd like to speak before you for a few minutes as the school administrator and as a parent. As you know, as I just mentioned, we had one tragedy. Last year we had a public schoolchild from Clifton Avenue Grade School in Lakewood that was run over by a car by a dismissal time. It's a little upsetting to me that I'm sitting here listening to all the people who got up before the board, and it seems like we are begging for our children's lives.

Being in the school business for almost eight years, it's a bit depressing knowing that we'll never have to go fight our local school board for certain busing issues or other safety issues that I feel I have to beg for them. In Lakewood we are a distinct community as you know. I represent the Lakewood Cheder School, which is a boys division of over 800 children, and the Bais Faiga School, which is a girls division of over 1000 girls. My kindergarten class between the boys and girls are 330 children. These are children between the ages of four and a half and six years old. My first through third grade, which are children between the ages of six through eight years old, is 700 children.



We have to stagger our dismissals due to the fact that there is just not enough room on our sidewalk or our streets to contain all our buses. We cannot close our streets down due to the fact that both schools are off a major highway, Route 9, in Lakewood.

Our parents pay on the average tuition between \$2000 to \$2500 per child. That does not include any busing costs or lunch costs or anything at all. Some of our parent body are students. As you all know, we have the largest college in America, which is located in Lakewood. A lot of our parents are students that graduated and just went to work. So they are really considered middle-income workers. Usually it's the father and a mother that works if the families not get too large.

The only thing that our children basically really get from the local school board, beside all the State programs that come along with any school, is the busing of the children to the school. Ninety-eight percent of my children are courtesy busing. The simple reason for that is that -- due to the fact that we are religious Jews -- on a Saturday we cannot drive, on holidays we cannot drive. So every one has to live within walking distance of a synagogue, walking distance of certain things that they must have access to in order to keep up with their tradition.

Our community which is compromised of at least 2000 families all live within a two-to-three square mile area in Lakewood. If anyone has come to Lakewood, I'm sure you've noticed that. Our school is located, I can probably say, smack in the middle of it. That means no one really lives more than a mile to a mile and a half away from our school. We do have some



children that come from Deal, New Jersey, and we have some that come from Belmar, but 98 percent of our children are courtesy busing.

I have over 150 children that are not even eligible for courtesy busing, which their parents would not let them walk to the school, which therefore we have to buy our own buses and transport them. It was one of those buses that the tragedy of our child happened. In the morning coming to school at 9:00, we have 28 busloads of children. Each busload holds 54 children. My average bus is 52 children. All this can be confirmed with the Lakewood Board of Education.

In Lakewood we have a few major highways. We have Route 9. We have County Line Road, which is a four-lane highway, where the speed limit is 50 miles an hour. We have Central Avenue which is around the lake. That means that Route 9 goes around the lake. We have Central Avenue. We have railroad tracks that cut through part of Lakewood which is used on a pretty steady basis.

This is only my school of 1800 children. We have at least another 1500 to 1800 children that go to different parochial schools in Lakewood. They all find themselves in the same problem.

If certain days that we have school that there is no busing provided, usually what happens is that we have car pools, and we have parents picking up their children. You can imagine, when you have 1800 children being picked up by parents, the traffic nightmare that we have is just unbearable. Route 9 usually is closed down when we have a dismissal with our busing. Now that will happen sometimes. The board of ed will close down on a snow day or an ice day, and we still feel that school should be in session.



That means that it was a bad call or they closed down earlier, and we can't get a hold of our parents. When we get a call from the board of ed that they're closing in an hour, due to the size of our school, we just can't close. We have no where to send the children to. So we keep them in until the regular time, and then we just make chain phone calls that their parents should pick them up. On days like that, it might be icy, it might be snow, we still have traffic tie ups, and it's basically a disaster.

As you note, our family sizes are usually larger than the average American family. Most of the families in our school -- at least I can say for my school -- has an average of between four to six children. The college graduates on an average of 150 to 200 young people every year that get married and stay in Lakewood. They have children, and they have to start sending their children to school. Within five years, we expect to have an enrollment of over 3000 children. This is all private, parochial children that do not take any money at all out of the local school board.

Again, the only thing that they basically get from the local school board is the busing. Anything that can be done to help our children would be greatly appreciated. After all, they are our future. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Rabbi. We really appreciate your coming today. Also, we extend our sympathy in the tragedy of your school.

RABBI JURKANSKI: That why I didn't want to wait until Jackson. I wanted to get it done.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Yes. You're welcome to have members of your community come to Jackson as well.



RABBI JURKANSKI: Sure. They sure will. Thanks a lot.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you so much for coming.

The next witness will be Eileen Markous from Monroe PTA. And then the only other person I have is Gus Kakavas from Toms River. If there is anyone who is in the room who did not sign up, this will be the last call. Sign up on the desk and bring your form up to Mr. O'Brien. Otherwise after the Toms River constituent, we will probably be closing down.

So please proceed, Mrs. Markous, and introduce yourself.

**E I L E E N   M A R K O U S:** Yes. My name is Eileen Markous. I'm a parent at James Monroe PTA. I'm an activist for busing. I hate using the word courtesy busing, because it's not a courtesy. It's a hazard. It's a hazard that exists out there. I was not prepared to speak today, so please just bear with me on some old notes that I had.

I've lived in Edison for over 40 years. When I grew up, most homes had one parent working and one parent at home. Kids knew when there was a problem going to and from school. They walked in groups. If there was a problem, they knew where to go for help. They don't know that today. If they yelled for help if there was a problem, parents came running. People came to help. They don't do that today. Most families today have both parents working. There's a lot of single homes. Many parents may work two and three jobs just to keep their heads above water just to live with the necessities of today, not the luxuries, not the computers, not the video games, and not the cell phones.



Many parents make just enough income to keep their head above water. They make too much to get State aid, but they don't make enough to handle the extra bills that it would be to bus their children to school. If you have two, three, or four children, that extra \$1000 in that busing cost will make a determination as to whether or not a parent has to give their child bread and jelly for dinner every night or whether or not they can pay to bus their child safely to school.

The State and the towns created the problems that exist today. The State and the towns have to accept some of that responsibility. I didn't want the industry to grow the way it did. I didn't want the overpopulation to grow the way it did. I didn't want to put my children in jeopardy. I didn't want this. The State did this. The towns, municipalities, and the county did this. And now the burden is being passed down to us not only in our taxes, but now again with the busing issue.

When you talk about the traffic situations saying, "Oh yes, putting a traffic light or putting a crossing guard up there, that's going to keep the kid safe." Well, you're wrong. I'm a registered nurse. I've also ridden with the First Aid Squad for almost 17 years. I've seen children die. I've had children die in my arms. I've seen the pain on parents faces when they lose a child.

We've staged a few protests in Edison in March and April of this year. And just to enlighten you on a few of them: We had approximately 300 children in the elementary school where my children go walk to school. I live 1.9 miles from this school, a block away from getting the transportation. When we walked, we had children and parents. We had over 20 police officers. We had two groups from two locations walking to the school. When



they changed the route that we were supposed to walk, the route that my children would be required to walk, the route was changed. A road was closed down. A county road was closed down so that children could cross that route. When I questioned the police officers as to why the route was changed, they said it was too dangerous to cross the intersection. If 20 police officers cannot keep one elementary school -- and we have 11 elementary schools in Edison -- safe with the routes that they would have to walk, how will the crossing guards keep these children safe? We don't have enough police officers in our towns to keep these children safe.

We also crossed Route 1 and Grandview Avenue in Edison. And I don't know how many of you are familiar with that area, but that's by Menlo Park Shopping Center. You have one road that comes down into Route 1. You have two other roads that come into Route 1 on the side and at the circle. There's no sidewalks there. We had approximately 18 children that walked across that route, which is the route that they would be required to walk. I had seven police officers -- seven that showed up -- because they heard that a small group of children that would have to cross that route on a daily basis were going to be crossing that road.

Channel 7 Eyewitness News showed up. They took video of the children crossing that road. Seven police officers with two to one and three to one ratio. A police officer was almost hit by a car -- a grown man. What's going to happen when there's a child there? They were so interested in walking the children across and around the circle to get them to a safe area that they never noticed that there was a parent behind with two small children. What happens if that mom had to go to work, and those two children were



standing on that corner and the light changed? They said they had the light and they could cross. And the car came down the hill and whipped onto Route 1 like they do all the time. Those children would be dead. Seven police officers couldn't keep 20 kids safe.

I'm concerned about other health issues with the 2 and 2.5 mile, and a gentleman spoke earlier that those figures should be reduced. I think we need to address the hazard of the backpacks that the children are required to carry. When I grew up, I don't remember the weight being what it is for these kids. My daughter at 70 pounds carries an average of 20- to 23-pound backpack. My child would be required to cross over county roads, walk up steep hills, make several turns to maneuver into the school area. When we staged our walk, I had asked a Board of Education member if he would be willing to carry the same weight on his back, and he agreed. When we got to school 1.9 miles later, he was dragging that backpack and swore he would never do it again. I would ask each and every one of you here, could you walk 1.9 miles up steep hills with one-third or even one quarter of your body weight strapped to your back and then stay in school all day and then have to walk back?

People look for the closest parking place. They don't want to walk in the shopping centers. Can you imagine walking with those heavy weights on? This needs to be considered and needs to be addressed in the busing issue, because this is another hazard. We're going to be paying down the line for our children when they have health problems -- back problems -- because of the tremendous weight that they are required to carry back and forth to school.



Again, as I stated earlier, I am a nurse, and I have seen children involved in car accidents and hit by cars. I think the worst pain a parent could feel is to have your child abducted. I think the worst pain is that. The next worst pain is have their child die. And if assisting in having our children get safely to school saves one life, then it's worth it. Go to an Emergency Room, ride with a First Aid Squad and look at the pain that those parents go through. When you put your kid to bed or your grandchild to bed, look at that kid and see how you would feel if you didn't have the money to pay for that busing, and that kid died.

I think the State has to do something. It has to do something to keep these kids safe. There's too many of them out there that are going to be at jeopardy. I know that I won't sleep at night if I weren't here today and trying to do something. I don't know that any of you could sleep at night knowing that you're the cause of a child to die.

Please, keep this alive, push this through, get us some help, because we need it out there. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Ms. Markous.

Assemblywoman Buono.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Yes. I just wanted to-- I'm responsible for Ms. Markous speaking today. I thank you. I know you weren't prepared. I appreciate-- We held a meeting in my district in Edison, and Ms. Markous spoke so eloquently. I want to thank her.

She brought up something today that I'd just like to reiterate and emphasize, the backpack issue. That's an incredible health issue. I have a 14-year-old who walks to the high school in Metuchen, and she's been



complaining of back pains lately. I have to give her back rubs every night. She's not a complainer. So that's another-- I'm glad that you brought that up. I appreciate it, because that's a long-term health effect that I don't think was present in the past. I lifted her backpack, and I couldn't believe it.

Thank you, again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Assemblywoman Buono.

In light of that, Alane Levine -- if I'm reading it correctly -- has asked to testify. She is also from James Monroe PTA. Before we finish with Mr. Kakavas, may we just finish with this testimony from--

Please, go ahead. I didn't notice until after the other speaker was speaking that you are from the same PTA.

**A L A N E L E V I N E:** And I'm prepared.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: We'll keep you together. Then we'll have the grand finale from Toms River.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, how wonderful. Okay. I am here today as a concerned parent also of Edison Township. I have two children going to school in Edison Township. My daughter walks to the middle school a few blocks away. My son takes a bus to the high school. We live more than 2.5 miles from the high school. So more or less you could say my children are being taken care of. They are not affected by the busing situation.

After growing up in Edison Township and watching it change so much in the past 30 years when I walked to school, I sympathize with the parents of the dangers of getting children to school safely. I worry about my own daughter walking to school. A few months ago, a child was walking to



school and more or less had to run out of the development, because a man stopped this particular child on the way to school. So it's just -- a lot of things happen going to school. This child was-- It was an attempted kidnapping. This was a block away from this child's house.

So it's not just the busing situation, health and safety. It's health and safety no matter how you look at it. You can educate the children, but the only way to educate the children is to getting them to school safely. Without getting them to school safely, education goes right out the window.

Crossing State roads, county roads, railroad tracks, busy intersections, even walking in the street because there are no sidewalks-- Unfortunately, New Jersey says it okay to do all these things with a crossing guard. Well, as Eileen said, we staged a walk in. We also staged parents coming and driving to school, and it was totally chaos. A crossing guard unfortunately isn't good enough in a lot of major places.

What we did, as Eileen said, everyone more or less left around the same time they would normally do if they had to walk to school. And as Eileen said, we needed police officers to cross the children, because crossing guards weren't efficient enough. It wasn't safe.

I think something needs to be done about courtesy busing or redefine it. Most of courtesy busing in a lot of cases is hazardous busing. My question is: What is hazardous busing? Until we know exactly what hazardous busing is, I don't think we can do anything. We need to redefine what hazardous busing is. I really don't think it should come out of Board of Education dollars. I think Board of Education dollars are for education not for busing. As Eileen said and a few other people have stated, municipalities and



State built up all our townships, streets -- I mean everything. It's not what it used to be. It's busier than ever.

Society has changed. I really think that the State and the municipalities need to sit down and decide if the children of today's society means what they say it means, and that is protecting them -- health and safety. They built up the towns. They should take responsibility of it and maybe share the cost or something. But, I'm sorry, parents can't do it alone in today's society.

Thank you for letting me speak.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you for coming. We really appreciate it. One of our goals was to have parents from our communities, and we've been very gratified to see the participation today. We're here to hear now from Gus Kakavas. Do I have that correctly? You'll help us out, and you'll introduce yourself.

We hear that this is one of the crackerjack transportation systems in the State. So we're very pleased that you came up to testify today.

**GUS KAKAVAS:** Well, I'm very pleased to be here, Assemblywoman. I want to thank you again. My name is Gus Kakavas. I'm the Director of Transportation for Toms River Regional Schools. I'm also here today in the capacity as the Legislative Chairman for the School Transportation Supervisors of New Jersey. As I started to say, I wanted to thank you, Assemblywoman, for taking the initiative to get this Task Force going. Its time has certainly come. We want to assist you as a group, the School Transportation Supervisors, in this very difficult task.



One of my parents is in the audience as well. I don't know if Mrs. Moore had a chance to speak, but she and I have been working very closely on this issue for several years. I've been the Transportation Coordinator in Toms River for over 18 years. In that time, we've seen our student population grow. We are the fourth largest district in the State. We have the largest suburban district in the State. We have over 5000 courtesy-bused students in my district -- 5000.

If our budget goes down, those students are going to be subjected to the possibility of crossing highways as six lanes of Route 37, Route 9, Hooper Avenue, which is the largest street in our area, Fischer Boulevard, and other thoroughfares of that nature. As of this date, they have not had to go through that simply because our budgets have not been defeated. But we face that prospect, and certainly this year is going to be a critical year for us as the dollars are dwindling, and our voters are having more and more difficulty approving budgets with their own financial situations being what they are.

I'm going to try to be very brief. The hour is late. I'm going to say simply that speaking on behalf of the School Transportation Supervisors, we have long held that defining hazardous routes is probably an effort in futility, because hazard to one person might not be hazard to another. But in speaking to the professionals, the Police Chiefs Associations that we talked to, they are going to have very great difficulty defining a route as not being hazardous. For to do so would put a tremendous burden on them should anything happen. So they're going to be reluctant to do that.

The criteria could change. Two days after announcing something was a safe route, many other variables could come in: detours, new types of



demographics being developed, and shopping centers being approved. All kinds of other things could develop where a route that was once considered safe might be hazardous. So we are asking the Task Force to try to steer away from the idea or the concept of defining hazardous. We think that's going to be very difficult and perhaps a waste of your resources.

What we have looked at for many, many years as really being the only answer, and I know it's been said here many times -- the real answer is to redefine remote. That's what's realistic. That's what is tangible. You can't change what the mileage says.

I'm sure it's been said here prior to my coming. I'm sorry I arrived a little late. The law that has set up a present remote definition predates World War II. It's a much different world today. What we are asking for is to simply use this as a starting point, as a debate point, and build from this. If you find fault with it, fine, come up with alternatives. But what we're going to introduce as an alternative route to the present remote definition is to have all kindergartners bused, all kindergartners bused. These are our most vulnerable children. In my district, we refer to them as our babies. When my bus drivers are on the radio and they are referring to picking up the kindergarten children, they're calling them babies: "I have to pick up the babies." We want all kindergartners bused. We feel that's the first step.

The second step would be to redefine first through sixth grade down to a half mile. And a second would be to redefine seventh through twelfth grade down to one mile. I'll repeat that quickly, kindergarten, all bused; first to six, half mile; and seven through twelve, one mile.



The funding for that-- We are proposing that the funding would be the very source of what has created the hazard, and that is the traffic. We are asking that it be considered either through a referendum to ask the voters if they would feel that it is appropriate or do it directly. But we would ask that dedicated funding through a surcharge on motor vehicle registrations be considered. The number of vehicles that are on the roads today are far greater than what was on the roads in the late 1930s. Why not surcharge the source of the hazard that has created the walk for these children to be different today than it was back then?

So we're asking that you consider a nonbinding referendum, a binding referendum, or legislation proposal, whatever would be most conducive. We would be looking for financing that change in the remote definition that way. And we would prefer to have it done that way so that that dedicated funding could not be changed in the future.

All of us in this room know that when it's funded through the normal budget process, many variables come in year to year subject to change and subject to a lot of different things coming up. Somewhere down the road, when the courtesy busing issue might not be an issue, it might be one of those things considered for cuts. We don't think that it should be cut. So we would be looking for those funds to be dedicated through the surcharge.

Very quickly and in just response to a couple of things, Joan Ponessa from Public Affairs Research Institute-- She and I have worked together on many committees in the past. She mentioned about the database. You may know, Assemblywoman Wright, that the database is being expanded as we speak.



The DOE has in place right now a new method of data collection that will be going out to the districts in the month of December that is going to be much more comprehensive than what has been used in the past few years. That is a direct answer to the Deloitte and Touche report that was submitted last year. So the database will be expanded, and there will be more information available to you as to the nature of the children that are walking, riding, and specifically how many empty seats are on buses, things of that nature. So we will have that information in the near future for you once this new method of data collection goes into place.

Another thing that came out was the Littell bill, S-1315, as possibly being an answer to the courtesy busing issue. Just as I threw out the caution before about tying in any funding for a change in the remote definition to budget sources, I also caution you that the Littell bill would pay for courtesy busing increases in the amount of courtesy-based children through its anticipated savings. There is a statewide coalition that is currently looking at the Littell bill very closely analyzing the numbers. We will be forthcoming very shortly with our analysis of what the projected savings may or may not be. But I would caution you that it's-- It would be probably again be an effort in the wrong direction right now to count on the Littell bill as the panacea for courtesy busing. We think it's not going to be the answer to that issue.

I want to also just elaborate a little bit more on what Mrs. Levine said that any answer to courtesy busing should not be done at the local district level as far as the funding source. As you know, we've had a couple of bills passed in the last few years which allowed parents to be billed back for courtesy busing, which allowed the municipalities to be billed for courtesy busing, which



allowed municipalities to bill parents for courtesy busing, and really all we've done is change from one pocket to another where the problem is being handled.

Let's go to the source of the problem, which is the traffic -- one of the sources. I think Mrs. Levine spoke about also on the concerns about the abductions and other things of that nature, which have nothing to do with traffic hazards but certainly are equal concerns to parents and, also, us at the district level as well. So I think we should look at those items equally.

I would simply say this. That in the future, we plan on being represented either by myself or other members of the School Transportation Supervisors at each of the future hearings that you do have. Hopefully, we'll have more information. I'll have some handouts for you and some other information to go through this a little bit in more detail.

I think that getting this first day under our belt and understanding the direction that you as a Committee (*sic*) are going-- I see that Assemblyman Malone, who I sit on his 30th District Committee -- we've already started on some things at the local level. I commend him for his efforts at that level. We are going to be here at your future hearings. We are committed to working with you as closely as we can to resolve this very emotional and very difficult issue, because nobody wants to see our children put in jeopardy.

So thank you for your help.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Before you leave, would we characterize your remarks today as representing the association, or are they representing yourself?



MR. KAKAVAS: My remarks today were representing the School Transportations Supervisors of New Jersey as their Legislative Chairman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay, thank you, sir. We will look forward to having further testimony. If there isn't someone available, you also can submit for the record, because the record will be open.

MR. KAKAVAS: Yes. In the future, I will have-- It probably will be myself speaking and maybe a couple of other of our members, and we will have written presentation as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: But the record is open right now for anything that anyone wants to share with us. So before you leave, I think Assemblywoman Buono--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: I just had a few questions. Your suggestion to redefine, to steer away from the hazardous redefining, or actually hazardous has never really been defined at the State level--

Let's just say that a first-grader lives within the half-mile radius that you suggest. What if they live right across the street from say Route 1, a State highway? Would your definition take into consideration the hazards that might be present even if it is within that radius?

MR. KAKAVAS: What we would propose in that situation is that the same rules that have applied to districts now with the 2 mile and 2.5 mile would then fall into place there where local controls, but the numbers would be so much fewer.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Right. Sure.

MR. KAKAVAS: They would be something that would be far more manageable at the district level. So if you had unique situations where



a first-grader would not be able to tolerate a half-mile walk-- Let's say it was not in a suburban situation, or it was in a situation where a high-speed highway would have to be transversed. If that were the situation, then the local district would follow the same format that they followed for the last 40 years. But the numbers would be so much smaller, so much more manageable, as I stated at the beginning of my testimony. Five thousand students in my district are part of this courtesy busing issue.

Just to address another thing about hazardous-- We, in Toms River, have had a long history of trying to address hazard. As Mrs. Moore will attest to, we have built sidewalks, we have put in curbs, we have hired crossing guards, we have put in stop lights, we have put in the flashing lights, we have put up all kinds of notification signs, we have met with parent groups, we have met with senior citizen groups, and we have done everything humanly possible to alleviate the hazardous condition.

Approximately 18 years ago when I started, we had less than 500 walkers in my district. We currently have over 4000 walkers in my district. That was all done through a long-range plan of getting more and more children who were nonremote off of school buses because of economic concerns.

In that same period of time -- a lot of other things 18 years ago-- The world was a lot different than it is today. There is an increasing amount of pressure on the Board of Education to reconsider routes that have been walking routes for many, many years where there are sidewalks, we there are crossing guards, where there are street lights to be reconsidered simply because the parents don't feel comfortable about their kindergartners walking two miles to school.



I'll tell you quite honestly. I don't know what thought went into the original remote definition, but how they can treat a kindergartner, a five-year-old, the same as they treat an eighth-grader, a 14-year-old, is absolutely beyond me. I've never had that question really thoroughly answered, and I think that at least our proposal starts to address that, maybe not perfectly, but at least makes an attempt.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Just one more comment. I found your testimony very interesting. It certainly sheds a different light on the subject. With regard to the funding mechanism, let me just say that sitting on the Appropriations Committee I know that when you dedicate funds, even if you dedicate them, it doesn't mean that they're sacrosanct, unfortunately, unless they're constitutionally dedicated. But supposedly if they're constitutionally, not just by a bill or a law other than by statute-- What about the fact that some of the parents' concerns arise not just from the traffic but from the increased threat of an abduction or the like? What about a surcharge on violent crime like the BCCB, that sort of thing that we do right now dedicated toward this?

MR. KAKAVAS: Certainly that's something we can definitely look at and perhaps there's ways for us to even get federal money to address that concern. That certainly might be available to us in some of our urbanized areas within the State. I think anything we can do to bring in additional moneys can work towards that. But again, when you deal with that threat, it's a very real threat to all of us as a gut feeling, but it's hard to measure.

So at least if you redefine remote-- At least if you go into that, you're dealing with a tangible item. You can talk about a lot of variables, but



they don't change the distance from a house to a school unless they built some new roads. That doesn't change, and you can at least tell a parent, "Yes, you do now get a bus because you're within that distance." And if you say no, at least you can show a parent why it's no. If they can come up in what we've done in Toms River-- If they can come up with our reasons why hazards have not been addressed, then you put them on buses until you address those hazards. But I certainly think that the numbers would be so greatly reduced by bringing in these new remote definitions, that we would put a whole new twist on how we're handling the courtesy busing issue. I honestly believe -- and this is not just me speaking; there are over 400 members of my group who represent school districts throughout the State. We all feel that hazardous is absolutely, as I said, an effort in futility.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Because everything will be hazardous then.

MR. KAKAVAS: Exactly. I would find it difficult to find anyone who would stake their professional reputation, whether they're in law enforcement, traffic engineering, or whatever, to say that a route was hazardous free. That is absolutely to me a statement that's just putting yourself on the block. So let's look at redefining the remote as a more tangible way and a way that we can look the parents in the eye and say, "At least we're working in the right direction." Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUONO: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Just one moment, please.

ASSEMBLYMAN MALONE: One question. This morning I had asked the Commissioner a question. Maybe in your experience with the



variety of busing situations-- If you have a bus that went out to pick up remote children and is half full on its way back, are you penalized if you picked up courtesy students?

MR. KAKAVAS: Under the current definitions, the answer to that is no. You're not penalized. Let me bring up two scenarios. First, under current legislation, the problem with doing that is if-- And I go through this with many parents. Mrs. Moore, I know she must be smiling behind me, because we get the question all the time. A bus will go in-- And what we've done in Toms River, so you understand this, we have a K-to-2 busing policy. In other words, even in an area that's currently walking, we only walk the older children. We will bus the kindergartners through second-graders in an attempt to lessen the impact on children when they are younger.

But the parents will say to us, "Look, I noticed that there's 10 empty seats on that bus when it gets to that particular school. My fourth-grader could just get right on that bus and take up that empty seat." And what I have to explain to the parent is, yes, there's 10 empty seats on that bus, but there's 35 third-graders through sixth-graders who live in your neighborhood. So how do I separate the 10 from the other ones? How do I say they are more important than the other ones? I can't do it.

So when we set up our boundaries and we set up our grade levels, that's the way it's done. We try whenever possible to get the buses to a maximum capacity, but there's certain limitations. You can't always fill 54 seats. I just can't allow somebody that doesn't fit the criteria that we've established in our district as a response to the courtesy busing issue-- I can't allow certain parents to be given privileges above others.



Now, let's take the second part of this scenario. Under proposed legislation under the S-40, A-20 bill, what is proposed now is that courtesy busing-- First of all, there is as an offshoot of the Deloitte and Touche, which was introduced as part of this new comprehensive funding bill-- There are going to be penalties for transportation when it's inefficient. What measures your inefficiency are the buses running with empty seats. If you are inefficient, you are going to be penalized on the amount of State aid that you receive. How does courtesy busing fit in? Courtesy-bused students count as empty seats.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Let us assure you that we had that discussion with the Commissioner this morning. The present amendments to the public school funding bills have delayed any discussion of any efficiency busing program until a presentation would be made by the Commissioner. He suggested it would come about in January of 1998. So that is not part of the current school funding proposal.

MR. KAKAVAS: So if I understand correctly then, we won't be dealing with that part of--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: We will not be-- At this moment, we sense from our caucuses-- I don't know about the minority caucus, but certainly from I think the majority caucus-- I think, the caucus supports delaying that. So I think if you agree that we assume that it would be delayed.

MR. KAKAVAS: Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: And that's what the Commissioner assured us. So as a result, we have not continued to have a



great discussion about that proposal because we feel that until the proposal is fully thought out and presented and we can debate that proposal, we should not have a further discussion of it at this time.

MR. KAKAVAS: Okay, great.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: We think that will help target our focus of our work right here.

MR. KAKAVAS: Well, it was worth a trip up here just to hear that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I hope we can deliver.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TURNER: Madam Chair, may I ask a question?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Yes, Assemblywoman Turner.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TURNER: You mentioned the partially full buses. How do you explain why there are 10 seats and how do you decide which of the 40 children has access to one of those seats? Do you take into consideration the health of a child for instance--

MR. KAKAVAS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TURNER: --if that child is asthmatic?

MR. KAKAVAS: Yes. We have a whole policy method of dealing with children that we classify as medically fragile. There's a whole procedure that the parent has to go through. That involves their own doctor, the school district's medical director, the school nurse, and when that whole procedure is followed, then the child would be put on the bus.

Okay, but there's also some negative parts to that. Before we got into that, we had some of our high schoolers, who were walkers, who were



claiming they were asthmatic. They were also turning out to be star players on our football team. (laughter) So there was an inconsistency. So the way we reacted to that was to come up with this policy.

So now, once we come up with these very specific criteria to be classified medically fragile to get a seat on a bus if you're in a walking area, that also restricts you from participating in extracurricular sports, extracurricular activities, and field trips. Some of these field trips that these children do, they are walking miles when they're on tours when they go on different things. So they're restricted from that, and they are also restricted from excessive gym classes and recess.

So there are certain caveats in order that a parent realizes if you are saying that your child is medically fragile. It's the whole picture that's medically fragile, not just the walk to school. Once you introduce that-- When we did that, we were getting perhaps maybe hundreds of requests for children to get medically fragile classifications. When we put those other restrictions in, it drops down to, in my district with over 18,000 students, we only get about maybe 20 children requesting medically fragile classification.

ASSEMBLYMAN MALONE: Is there a chance we can get a copy of that policy?

MR. KAKAVAS: I'll ask my district. Sure, we can send that over.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Get it to OLS, that would be fine, to Mr. O'Brien's office.

MR. KAKAVAS: Okay.



ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I want to thank you very much. It's been a very enlightening experience for us to have you. We had heard about you before we got here.

MR. KAKAVAS: Oh, okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: So we're very pleased that you had took the time. I know that we will see you at some of the other hearings.

MR. KAKAVAS: Absolutely. I'll be working very closely with Assemblyman Malone.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I understand that, and we're grateful for that effort and your expertise.

MR. KAKAVAS: Great. Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Before we close, I just have to ask one more time. I assume everyone's signed up who wanted to speak.

Before we close, I should have earlier, when Mr. Henderson talked about the Azzolina package-- It is Assemblyman Azzolina who led the way on the most current legislative initiatives on particularly courtesy busing and addressing some of these very difficult issues. He had a long-time commitment out of the country long before we set the date for this public hearing. But he did agree to let us go ahead, and he will be present in the other hearings and particularly when we will be meeting in his district in Middletown.

I would just like to remind anyone who may not be aware that the next public hearing for this group is December 17 at Jackson; December 18 at Hunterdon Central High; and then December 19 at Middletown High in Middletown.



I want to thank all of the participants who are still here, and those who stayed to hear us receive this testimony. I think you would agree with me that it's been extremely valuable. But I also would be remiss if I didn't thank the South Brunswick Township, particularly Donato Nieman, who is the Business Administrator. He was here earlier. He came in as someone was testifying, and I did not want to interrupt the witness. So I want the record to show that we're truly grateful to the Township of South Brunswick for being such great hosts for us.

We will adjourn this hearing until we meet the next time in Jackson Township.

Thank you very much for coming.

**(HEARING CONCLUDED)**