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School Bus Safety: A Prosecutor's Call to Action

By Justin Meyers, President & Chief Innovation Officer, BusPatrol

Prosecutors enter the courtroom for one reason—to seek justice. Yet anyone who has ever handled a case involving the death or serious injury of a child knows there is no conviction, no restitution, and no carefully crafted allocution that can truly fill that void. Justice, in those cases, is measured in the tragedies we prevent, not just the ones we prosecute.

Every day in this country, we are quietly running a high-risk experiment around our school buses. We put children, our most vulnerable road users, into what we tell them is the safest vehicle on the road, and then we surround that bus with adult drivers who are frequently distracted and impatient. When that experiment fails, it is prosecutors and traffic safety professionals who are called in to pick up the pieces.

As a father, a traffic safety advocate, and someone who believes deeply in our judicial system, I don't see school bus safety as a niche transportation issue. I see it as a direct call for help to

the prosecutorial community and as one of the clearest opportunities we have to change the system, so fewer families ever need us in the first place.

The Hidden Crisis Around the Yellow Bus

School bus safety feels intuitive. As children, we are told that the big yellow bus is a safe haven that takes us to class and brings us home again. As new drivers, we learn that flashing red lights and an extended stop arm are non-negotiable signals to stop. Somewhere along the way, too many drivers forget that lesson.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) conducts an annual survey of illegal passes of stopped school buses. According to its 2025 report¹, school buses were illegally passed **over 39 million times** in a single school year across the United States. That is more than 39 million near-misses in which, by sheer grace and luck, a child was not struck.

Behind those numbers are countless stories where grace and luck ran out: children who have watched classmates, friends, and neighbors struck in front of them and who carry that trauma for years; bus drivers who replay these moments on a loop in their minds; parents and caregivers who stand helpless at the curb as horror unfolds just feet away. And these are only the reported instances. Every prosecutor reading this knows that what reaches the docket is often just the visible tip of a much larger problem. We cannot wait for tragedy and community outrage. This crisis demands the same care, attention, and urgency that we bring to other serious threats to public safety.



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Why School Bus Safety Belongs on Your Docket

You may be thinking, “I care about kids, but we don’t really have a school bus problem in my jurisdiction.” Traffic safety prosecutors know better than most that if you are dealing with speeding, impairment, distraction, or aggressive driving, you already have a school bus safety problem.

School bus safety sits squarely at the intersection of several familiar risk factors. Children act as pedestrians every time they approach or leave a bus stop. Drivers who try to “beat the bus” instead of stopping are weaponizing speed against children. Phones, in-vehicle technology, and simple inattention erode the already narrow margin for error when a child steps out in front of a bus. The same high-risk behaviors you see in your most serious cases—impaired and reckless driving—are present here as well; only now they unfold at a child’s school bus front door.

Most children rely on multiple forms of transportation each day—walking, biking, riding in cars, and boarding school buses. At every transition, students rely on drivers obeying the rules of the road. Illegal passing of school buses is not a mere technical violation. It is high-risk, antisocial conduct that endangers a uniquely vulnerable population.

From the vantage point of a prosecutor, school bus cases present a rare opportunity. This is an area where the data proves that early, consistent, and visible intervention can prevent the next fatal or life-altering crash.

¹ Nat’l Ass’n of State Dirs. of Pupil Transp. Servs., *NASDPTS Survey of Illegal Passing of School Buses—2025 Results*, www.nasdpts.org/stop-arm-violations (last visited Feb. 10, 2026).

A Growing National Movement

In December 2025, BusPatrol convened the first-ever National School Bus Safety Summit in Washington, DC, issuing what was a cry for help. In partnership with the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA), Safe Kids Worldwide, and many other organizations, nearly 500 advocates gathered to examine the policies, practices, and public engagement strategies needed to respond.

The National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) was well represented by Erin Inman, whose perspective underscored a key truth: without prosecutors, any school bus safety strategy is incomplete. Later this month, GHSA will release a **National Action Plan for School Bus Safety**, informed in large part by what we heard at that summit.



Erin Inman, Director of the National Traffic Law Center, speaks on the important role that prosecutors play in bus safety at the National School Bus Safety Summit.

The coalition is growing, and we need the unique authority and credibility that only prosecutors bring. There is a clear path for TSRPs, traffic safety prosecutors, and line prosecutors to lead.

How Prosecutors Can Move the Needle

Below are practical, courtroom-grounded steps that prosecutors and Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors (TSRPs)² can take to turn concern into measurable safety gains. These strategies are not theoretical; they align with tools you already use every day.

Treat Near-Misses Like the Warnings They Are

Judges and prosecutors should be cautious about allowing routine reductions or dismissals in school bus stop-arm cases, particularly where the evidence is strong. Illegal passing of a stopped school bus cannot be treated as a "minor" traffic offense. In your policies and plea guidelines, it is essential to recognize that the absence of injury does not mean the behavior is low-risk. These cases should be framed for what they truly are: near-miss child endangerment events.

When the legal system treats these violations with gravity, the community receives a clear message that protecting children at the bus stop is a serious legal responsibility, not a suggestion.



National School Bus Safety Summit (from left to right): Sharon Bryson, Director, Delaware Office of Highway Safety; Karoon Monfared, Chief Executive Officer, BusPatrol; Anthony Baldoni, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, Axon; Fred Humphries, Vice President of US Government Affairs, Microsoft

² The role of the TSRP varies by state. In some states, TSRPs work only on impaired driving issues.

Pair High-Visibility Enforcement with Thoughtful Prosecution

Around the country, states can create high-visibility enforcement periods focused on illegal school bus passing, often in conjunction with automated enforcement programs.³ A great example of this is *Operation Safe Stop* in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These efforts are most effective when they are coupled with principled, consistent responses in the courtroom.

Prosecutors can work closely with your State Highway Safety Office and law enforcement agencies to ensure that enhanced enforcement is matched with consistent adjudication and outcomes. There is an opportunity to connect school bus enforcement efforts to broader NHTSA-funded campaigns around speeding, distraction, or impaired driving, ensuring that messaging and strategy reinforce one another. Consider adding this message to media opportunities—press conferences, op-eds, and community events—to make clear that if a driver passes a stopped school bus, they should expect to be held accountable.

When enforcement surges are paired with thoughtful prosecution, they produce durable changes in behavior rather than one-time headlines.

Strengthen Judicial Understanding Through Training

BusPatrol is working with judicial partners to expand the quality and availability of judicial training on school bus laws. These laws vary widely by state and are often misunderstood, even by experienced members of the bench and bar.

Prosecutors are well-positioned to shape these efforts. By collaborating with TSRPs, judicial educators, and BusPatrol, you can help ensure that state-specific training includes stop-arm any applicable statutes, elements of proof, defenses, and the range of available sanctions and conditions. Inviting judges and defense counsel into problem-solving conversations about which remedies best change behavior—particularly for first-time violators—helps move these cases beyond routine disposition and toward meaningful prevention. Sharing real case examples and victim stories, with appropriate protections, grounds these trainings in lived experience rather than abstract legal principles.

A bench that truly understands the law and the risks is more likely to support strong, evidence-based outcomes in these cases.

Mandate Evidence-Based Behavior Change, Not Just Fines

We know from experience that fines alone rarely change behavior.⁴ In some instances, overly punitive financial penalties can even create collateral consequences without meaningfully improving safety.

Prosecutors can advocate for mandatory, evidence-based curricula for individuals found liable for school bus violations, with content focused on pedestrian safety, distraction, and child development—including things like visibility, reaction time, and how quickly a situation at a bus stop can become catastrophic. Where state law allows, you can support diversion or deferred adjudication programs that require completion of such curricula and, where appropriate, supervised driving-behavior conditions. You can also support the use of victim impact statements or videos, when appropriate, that convey the real trauma suffered by families and bus drivers.

The goal is not simply to impose a cost. The goal is to reduce recidivism and change the mental model of the driver behind the wheel.



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³ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *Operation Safe Stop* (2025), www.pa.gov/agencies/dmv/driver-services/school-bus-drivers/operation-safe-stop (last visited Feb. 10, 2026).

⁴ See Ins. Inst. for Highway Safety, *With Publicity and Education, Traffic Safety Laws Can Change Behavior* (2021), www.iihs.org/news/detail/with-publicity-and-education-traffic-safety-laws-can-change-behavior (last visited Feb. 10, 2026).

Build Capacity While Protecting Due Process in Automated Enforcement

Many jurisdictions are turning to stop-arm automated enforcement technology to detect and document violations that would otherwise go unreported.⁵ When implemented thoughtfully, these programs can dramatically increase the number of dangerous behaviors that come to light.

For these efforts to succeed, however, the legal system must be ready for them. That means ensuring sufficient clerical, prosecutorial, and judicial capacity to process a high volume of citations. It means establishing clear procedures for reviewing evidence, addressing challenges, and ensuring due process. And it requires proactive communication with defense counsel and the public about how the technology works, what it captures, and how privacy is protected.

Consistent, transparent processes are essential if automated enforcement is to be seen as a legitimate, fair, and effective deterrent.

Consider Specialized Dockets for School Bus Violations

In some jurisdictions, specialized traffic dockets or structured calendars for school bus cases may help courts manage these matters more effectively. Places like Chesterfield County (Virginia)⁶ have found that concentrating these cases can promote greater consistency in adjudication and findings of liability, especially when similar fact patterns appear repeatedly.

Specialized dockets can also make it easier to incorporate joint educational components—for example, requiring all violators on a given calendar to complete the same curriculum and then return for a shared review or follow-up hearing. Perhaps most importantly, they send a visible signal to the community that these offenses are different because of who they endanger.

As a prosecutor, you can initiate conversations with court leadership about whether a specialized approach might make sense in your jurisdiction.

Consistent, transparent processes are essential if automated enforcement is to be seen as a legitimate, fair, and effective deterrent.

Support Stop-Arm Automated Enforcement as a Change Agent

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has recommended that every school bus in America be equipped with stop-arm automated enforcement technology.⁷ Put simply, the reason is that it works.

From a prosecutor's perspective, this technology provides clear, objective evidence of violations, including video, time-stamped imagery, and vehicle identification. It amplifies law enforcement capabilities by extending coverage beyond what officers alone can reasonably provide. And it brings to light a whole category of violations that would otherwise never appear in the legal system, giving you the chance to address dangerous behavior before it escalates into tragedy.

In an era when evidentiary quality matters more than ever, these tools can mark the difference between a weak, discretionary ticket and a well-documented case that withstands legal challenge.

⁵ Nat'l Conf. of State Legislatures, *State School Bus Stop-Arm Camera Laws* (2025), www.ncsl.org/transportation/state-school-bus-stop-arm-camera-laws (last visited Feb. 10, 2026).

⁶ Chesterfield County, *Safe School Buses*, www.chesterfield.gov/safeschoolbuses (last visited Feb. 12, 2026).

⁷ Nat'l Transp. Safety Bd., *School Bus Safety* (2025), www.nts.gov/Advocacy/SafetyIssues/Pages/School-Bus-Safety.aspx (last visited Feb. 10, 2026).

Work Toward Standardized, Proportionate, Penalty Structures

Across neighboring jurisdictions, penalties for identical conduct can vary dramatically. That inconsistency undermines deterrence, erodes public trust, and can make your own prosecutorial priorities harder to explain.

Prosecutors can play a constructive role in examining and improving these structures. Working alongside judicial leadership, state highway safety officials, and safety advocates, you can help review current frameworks and identify gaps or imbalances. You can advocate for clear, graduated penalties that increase in response to repeat violations or aggravating factors such as speed, impairment, or the presence of a child outside the bus. And you can help ensure that any statewide framework preserves appropriate judicial discretion while still sending a strong, consistent message about the seriousness of these violations.

Aligned, proportional responses make it clear that passing a stopped school bus is never treated as routine.

Beyond the Courtroom: Prosecutors as Community Safety Champions

Your influence does not end at the courtroom door. For many in the community, your voice is one of the most trusted matters of safety and justice, and that credibility can be a powerful force for prevention.

National safety organizations and partners such as BusPatrol offer a wide range of free community education resources that can be integrated into local campaigns. These materials address pedestrian and child safety, distracted and impaired driving, and safe routes to school and bus stop awareness. When prosecutorial perspectives are woven into these resources, they become far more compelling and concrete.

By lending your office's voice to these efforts, you can help ensure that the legal expectations are well understood long before anyone appears in court.



Aligned, proportional responses make it clear that passing a stopped school bus is never treated as routine.

Share Your Voice and Build Alliances

As prosecutors, you see the consequences of poor driving decisions in a way few others do. That vantage point is invaluable in prevention, but only if it is brought into the broader safety conversation.

One starting point is to work closely with your Highway Safety Office if you are not already part of its planning and evaluation process. These offices often shape statewide strategies and funding decisions, and your insights into risk and accountability can be critical. Another is to connect with your local Safe Kids Coalition⁸ and other injury-prevention groups as regular partners, rather than occasional collaborators, so that your perspectives inform their campaigns from the outset.

You can also reach out to your local school district transportation director and bus contractors and simply ask what they are seeing at bus stops. Ask where the hot spots are, which times of day seem riskiest, and what patterns they worry about most. Then consider how your office can be a megaphone for this often under-recognized group of safety professionals, translating what they see on the road into public messaging, enforcement priorities, and courtroom practices.

When prosecutors step into these conversations, it elevates the issue and makes clear that school bus safety is not just a transportation concern. It is a public safety and justice priority.

⁸ Safe Kids Worldwide, www.safekids.org (last visited Feb. 12, 2026).

A Coordinated, Relentless Push

The steps outlined here are not meant to be a checklist or a one-time campaign. Instead, they are an invitation to join a coordinated, relentless push to make school bus safety a permanent part of our traffic safety culture.

Every illegal pass of a stopped school bus is a moment of profound risk. Every decision you make—as a TSRP, a line prosecutor, or a chief—about how to charge, how to negotiate, what to recommend in terms of consequences, and how to speak to your community can help shift behavior.

Together, across every state, every district, and every community, we can build a truly safe system where no child has to pay with their life for an adult's impatience or inattention. Our kids deserve nothing less—and as prosecutors committed to justice, you are uniquely positioned to help deliver it.

About the Author

Justin Meyers is the President & Chief Innovation Officer at BusPatrol, the nation's leading provider of automated school bus stop arm enforcement technology. He previously served as Chief of Staff in the Suffolk County (NY) District Attorney's Office, where he oversaw complex operations and helped lead major public safety initiatives. Before joining BusPatrol, Meyers also served as New York City's Head of Public Safety and Public Safety Technology Czar, working at the intersection of law enforcement, technology, and traffic safety to protect communities and strengthen justice system outcomes.



Love the Bus Month was created to raise awareness of the essential role the yellow school bus and the professionals who operate them play in education and the daily lives of students and families. The initiative promotes student transportation safety and reliability. For more information, go to [NAPT Love the Bus](#).

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