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**Standing Committee on
Justice Policy**

Safer School Buses Act, 2021

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Friday 26 March 2021

**Comité permanent
de la justice**

Loi de 2021 pour des autobus
scolaires plus sécuritaires

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Vendredi 26 mars 2021

Chair: Daryl Kramp
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Daryl Kramp
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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CONTENTS

Friday 26 March 2021

Safer School Buses Act, 2021, Bill 246, Mr. Harris / Loi de 2021 pour des autobus scolaires plus sécuritaires, projet de loi 246, M. Harris	JP-699
Mr. Mike Harris	JP-699
Let's Remember Adam: Stop for the School Bus Campaign; Police Association of Ontario; Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region	JP-707
Mr. Pierre Ranger	
Mr. Bruce Chapman	
Mr. Benoit Bourgault	
School Bus Ontario; Ontario Association of School Business Officials, transportation committee; Ms. Megan Odd	JP-714
Ms. Nancy Daigneault	
Mr. Robert Monster	
Mr. Roy Wierenga	
Mr. Tony Giverin	JP-722

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Friday 26 March 2021

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA JUSTICE

Vendredi 26 mars 2021

The committee met at 0905 in committee room 2 and by video conference.

SAFER SCHOOL BUSES ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 POUR DES AUTOBUS SCOLAIRES PLUS SÉCURITAIRES

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 246, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act /
Projet de loi 246, Loi modifiant le Code de la route.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Justice Policy will now come to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 246, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Friday, March 26, 2021. That's today. The deadline for filing amendments to the bill is 12 noon on Monday, March 29, 2021.

We have the following member in the room: MPP Harris. The following members are participating remotely: MPP Bouma, MPP Kusendova, MPP Morrison, MPP Park, MPP Hogarth, MPP Babikian, MPP Yarde.

We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, interpretation, and broadcast and recording.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it's important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you and until you are unmuted before starting to speak. I want to indicate, as well, that participants can speak in the language of their choice, since we do have interpretation services.

Are there any questions before we begin?

MR. MIKE HARRIS

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Seeing none, I will now call on the sponsor of the bill, the member for Kitchener–Conestoga, MPP Mike Harris.

Mr. Harris, you will have 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by 45 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into three rounds of six minutes for the government members and three rounds of six minutes for the official opposition. I will give reminders of the time remaining during the presentation and the questions.

MPP Harris, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mike Harris: Before I begin, I want to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for their invitation to appear here this morning.

Bill 246, the Safer School Buses Act, is about improving child safety and making the 830,000 students who ride a bus every day even safer when they go to and from school. Like many of you, I am a parent, and keeping my children safe is my number one priority. It is the most important responsibility that my wife and I have. Building a better province for my five children is why I made the decision to run in 2018. I made a commitment to the people of Kitchener–Conestoga that I would put the protection of their children at the centre of all I do. That is why I introduced Bill 246.

When my children leave for school in the morning, I trust that the government has put in place all of the necessary protections so that they return home safe and sound. This includes my son Maverick, who takes the school bus every day.

During a meeting with Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region, I was floored when I found out that Ontario is the only place in North America—I'm going to say that again: the only place in North America—that does not use the amber-red warning system on school buses, especially since we have known for over 20 years that it is more effective at warning vehicles that a bus is approaching a stop and proven to be safer.

I began to speak with my local bus operators in Waterloo region, and it turns out, not only are they supportive of this change; they have been asking for it and expecting it for many years. After those informative discussions, I made it a priority to bring forward the necessary legislative changes to get amber lights on school buses.

As you will hear throughout the delegations today, transitioning Ontario's school buses to the amber-red warning system has the support of industry, law enforcement and safety advocates. It is a common-sense, low-cost change that would drastically improve the safety of our buses.

This bill proposes to replace the red inner warning lamps on the front and back of school buses with amber lights. For most buses, this would only require the change of a simple lens cap. When a school bus driver is approaching a stop, they would use the amber lights to let motorists know that they will soon be letting a child on or off the bus. Similar to a stoplight, motorists would know to slow down and proceed with caution. Once they are at a stop, the bus driver would activate the flashing red lights and the stop arm, giving a clear indication that a child may be on the road.

You might be asking yourself why having two colours would make such a big difference in the safety of our school buses. That's a fair question because, on the face of it, having an all-red system where drivers know red means stop could appear safer. But let's imagine that a commuter is on their regular route home from work and every day they pass a school bus. On a day when they leave the office at 3, they meet this bus when it is approaching a stop. With Ontario's current all-red system, the bus driver they meet activates their flashing lights when they are slowing down, as they are required to by law. But because the bus is not at a full and complete stop, the bus with the flashing red lights passes that commuter nearly every day. We're all creatures of habit, so when the commuter meets the bus with the red lights on a regular day, they don't typically come to a full stop, as they're expecting that bus to pass them. Only today, that commuter leaves a little later, and they meet that bus at a different stop. It still has its red lights flashing, but today, that bus is completely stopped. I don't think I need to describe to the committee what could possibly happen if the commuter doesn't notice the stop arm and proceeds to pass the bus.

0910

This could sound far-fetched, but it happens thousands of times every day across the province. Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay estimates there are 30,000 illegal passes of school buses every day in Ontario—30,000. In my region, Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region estimates that number to be in the hundreds, if not thousands, just in Waterloo region alone. That is hundreds of times in my community that a driver passes a bus and a child could have been on the road.

I want to share a quote with you from Debbie Ranger, the mother of Adam Ranger, who was tragically killed when a driver blew past flashing red lights in the town of Mattawa 21 years ago: "If you run a school bus light, you can be 100% certain there's a pedestrian there. And not only a pedestrian there, but a child."

Those words are frightening, especially given all that is happening across the province every single day. But the thing that concerns me the most is the majority of those blow-bys, as they are referred to, go unreported, and drivers do not get charged. And when they do get charged, some will use a defence that while the red lights were flashing the bus was not at a complete stop—because that is the way it's written under the Highway Traffic Act. It's infuriating to me that an individual who puts a child's life at risk can use this excuse to try to get out of the charges. Transitioning to an amber-red system would not only make it clear to drivers what they are obligated to do when approaching a school bus, but it would also make prosecuting those who have been issued provincial notices of offence much easier. A clear warning period also makes the roads safer for drivers following a school bus.

Shortly after this bill was tabled, a constituent who is a commercial vehicle operator reached out to me. He has spent years as a long-haul trucker, and he shared that there have been several instances where he has been forced to

slam on his brakes on the highway, going 80 kilometres an hour, because a bus activated its red signals and he wasn't sure where or when it was stopping. These are massive trucks, weighing around 20,000 kilograms in some cases and 60,000 kilograms when they're fully loaded. They can't stop on a dime like a small car. Braking hard even in good weather conditions can cause these trucks to lose control; now imagine the middle of winter, after a snowstorm in northern Ontario or even eastern Ontario. My constituent went on to say that the amber lights would be a welcome sight, as they would give him the time he needs to get off the accelerator and brake to make a safely controlled stop, making it safer for any cars he may be following and any vehicles behind him.

I want to take a moment to thank all my constituents in Kitchener–Conestoga who have reached out to my office over the last several months to share their support for Bill 246 and, of course, the stakeholders, many of whom are scheduled to present today, who have shared their recommendations with me about how to strengthen this bill.

School Bus Ontario, which represents over 130 operators across the province, has done a significant amount of advocacy work to push this change forward. Executive director Nancy Daigneault, who will speak to the committee this morning, has called the amber-red system "a definite road safety benefit" when compared to the current all-red one and has remarked that this bill will "greatly increase" student safety on school buses.

There is no reason why Ontario should hold on to the all-red system any longer. We have known, like I said earlier, for 20 years that the amber-red system is much safer. In fact, Transport Canada recommended all province transition to this system back in 2002. It shouldn't take the province 20 years to adopt a system that would make school transport safer for kids today.

While a bus is still the safest way for a student to get to school, in the past 20 years, there have been accidents, and those are accidents involving children. It happened in my riding in 2012, when a truck blew past a stopped bus with flashing lights, striking a 12-year-old girl. We heard the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues share her family's personal story during second reading debate in the Legislature—and of course, Adam Ranger, who I mentioned earlier in my remarks. We'll be hearing from Adam's brother Pierre very shortly, but I want to take a moment and recognize his advocacy in pushing this issue forward.

Let's Remember Adam petitioned the Legislature in the fall of 2019, asking for the province to make the switch to the amber-red system. It was my pleasure to present his petition on two occasions and to fully endorse it. Let's Remember Adam is making a positive difference in the face of a tragedy, and I commend and thank Pierre and the Ranger family for everything that they have done. The loss of a child is unbearable for any family. But their advocacy on this issue and all of the other school bus safety measures they are pushing forward will save the lives of children in this province.

I know I've already mentioned it, but I cannot emphasize enough that every day there are 30,000 drivers out there illegally passing a school bus here in the province—30,000 times when someone's child, grandchild, sibling, niece, nephew or friend could have been crossing the road.

Beyond my role as a legislator, as a parent I have an obligation to do something about this, and I am pleased to have the support of both the Minister of Education and the Minister of Transportation on this issue. They both have demonstrated their commitment to supporting student transportation and making school buses as safe as possible. This includes record spending of well over \$1 billion for student transportation, the highest investment in Ontario's history. But as the Minister of Education put it, while we may lead in funding, every other province is leaps and bounds ahead of us when it comes to the adoption of the amber-red system. It is absolutely unacceptable that this province is playing catch-up on a common-sense measure that would protect children.

I asked the Legislative Assembly library to look into when other provinces adopted the amber-red system. Most states have been using the system—get this—since the 1970s and 1980s. Manitoba adopted it in 1985, and a section of the Prince Edward Island's Highway Traffic Act that mandates amber-red lights dates back to 1964.

By the time this bill comes into force, if it should pass, every other jurisdiction in North America will have been using the amber-red system for nearly an entire decade. That's 10 years. I can't help but wonder how many accidents and near misses could have been prevented if we had adopted this system sooner.

I want to recognize the drivers of Ontario's 18,000 school buses. They are the ones on the front lines with the responsibility of getting children to and from school safely. Especially in our rural and northern communities, some drivers will transport kids from their first day of kindergarten until they graduate high school. They care about these kids and build a bond with them, similar to the one that educators have with their students. I've heard about the toll it takes on them every single time they have a blow-by—to imagine the devastating consequences one careless driver's decision could have had. As legislators, we should be passing bills like the Safer School Buses Act, which would reduce the number of blow-bys they experience each and every day, to make their job a little easier.

Committee members, as I near the end of my presentation this morning, I want to once again repeat what this bill is all about. It's about protecting our children, their friends and all the other students across this province. The Safer School Buses Act would make the buses they ride safer so they can get to school, learn and return home to their families at the end of the day. Even if you're not a parent, I'm sure that the deeper meaning of what this bill is trying to do resonates with you. Again, to all the members, thank you for your time and inviting me to present before you this morning.

While I know they are not on the call yet, I also want to be on the record and show my appreciation to all the

presenters who are taking the time to join us here today. I know we have some people from Waterloo region, the GTA and Mattawa who will be presenting, so we are going to hear voices and perspectives from all across this province.

I wholeheartedly believe that all of us who are part of these hearings today have an opportunity to work together and do something good that should have been done many, many years ago.

I hope I can count on your support for this bill, as I did at second reading, and see it move forward to the House for third reading and royal assent so Ontario can finally get on board and make our buses safer.

And with that, Chair, I'm now ready to take any questions that the committee members might have.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much for that presentation.

I understand MPP Singh has joined us. MPP Singh, if you would identify yourself and confirm whether you are in Ontario.

0920

Mr. Gurratan Singh: MPP Singh here, calling from Ontario.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you, MPP Singh.

Now we'll proceed with the three rounds of six minutes of questions. We'll start with the opposition members. MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his comments and for this bill. Certainly, the NDP are quite supportive of it. We've supported similar measures in the past, particularly around school bus safety. I think your comment about the province playing catch-up on this issue is particularly poignant.

This seems like such a simple, easy-to-fix measure. As a member of the government party—your government has shown over the last three years its willingness to ram legislation through this House as fast as humanly possible on issues that are not as well researched, well supported, well understood common-sense measures that are broadly supported, including by us. I have to wonder why this measure hasn't been packaged in a government bill and quickly passed at any point in the last three years, and why, instead, as a government member, this is following through a private member's bill process which, as you know, takes much longer to move through the House and the committee process. What guarantee are we going to get from this government that we'll actually see this bill come back for third reading? It could be passed quite quickly and quite immediately if we were to package it up into any government bill. We could have this passed within a week.

Mr. Mike Harris: Obviously, that's a great question.

A few things with this: We've done about a year's worth of consultation on this bill. If we had done that through typical government processes, as you know, it probably would have taken even longer. So we've been able to speed that process up, which is great, but we had to make sure that we hit everybody, that we consulted with

the transportation agencies, with the bus operators, manufacturers, obviously school boards, and of course, the different safety advocates and police organizations. We feel that we really did a very fulsome consultation.

It's interesting; we've actually gone back and tried to figure out why this bill wasn't done sooner, whether it be our government or the governments of the last 20 to 30 years, and there's no reason. We can't find it. It is literally the strangest thing. I don't know why the appetite just hasn't been there. When we were talking in our consultations with everybody, as I mentioned in my remarks earlier, they thought that this was going to come down the pipe 10 or 15 years ago. They've been kind of waiting and ready for it.

I'm glad that we're finally getting it—hopefully—done, that it's going to pass clause-by-clause over the next week, and then hopefully get reported back to the House and receive royal assent in the near future. That's what I'm pushing for, and that's what I want to see get done.

Thank you for the question.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Other questions from the opposition?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I hear where you're coming from, and my only comment back is, I certainly value the level of consultation and engagement that has taken place on a really straightforward measure that, like I said, I'm incredibly supportive of and that my party is incredibly supportive of. We're happy to see this move forward.

I do think I disagree on the point that, if this had come back in a government bill, that would have taken longer.

Just as a comment—I wish your government had taken this level of consultation and engagement on a number of their bills that I think have been rushed through this House over the last few years. But I don't necessarily want to belabour the point.

My next question is around some pieces that I wonder if you had considered for inclusion in this bill. I know there have been private members' bills in the past around making the insides of buses safer, whether that's mandatory seat belts for students—but most recently, within the COVID-19 context, as the NDP we've been putting forward proposals and a call to this government to reduce the number of students allowed in a bus for COVID-19. I wonder if there's going to be consideration from your government, in terms of making the insides of our buses safer, in terms of capping the number of students who are allowed on buses during a pandemic and creating a more specific policy around that.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Harris, 30 seconds left.

Mr. Mike Harris: I appreciate where you're going with this. That's a little bit outside the scope of this bill, but what I can say is that as a government, we have provided the most funding that has ever been provided for school buses. That includes added cleaning. There's new funding going into the driver retention system that was announced in the budget on Wednesday. Of course, stop-arm cameras were another really big piece. We allowed

stop-arm cameras to be used as a single source of evidence early in our mandate.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The first round of six minutes has elapsed.

We're now moving on to the government for a round of six minutes of questions. I recognize MPP Hogarth.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, MPP Harris, for bringing this forward. It's a really important bill. I remember driving along the northern highways and seeing that sign, "Let's Remember Adam," so it's really nice to hear a little bit more about that story. Any tragedy of any child that loses his life is a tragedy for all of us, and so I want to thank you once again for bringing this forward to ensure that our children are safe. We all have a responsibility to make sure they're safe.

You mentioned that Bill 246 has the support of law enforcement. I see that we have Bruce Chapman, the president of the Police Association of Ontario, speaking later on today.

Would you be able to share a little bit more with the committee about what you've heard from various law enforcement agencies across the province? What have they been saying, and how can we make this work for everybody?

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, absolutely. In part of our consultation process, we wanted to make sure that we reached out to law enforcement, because at the end of the day, really, they're the ones who are laying the fines. They're the ones who have to be aware of what any new changes to the Highway Traffic Act might mean, and we certainly took their input very seriously.

Like you said, we're going to have the Police Association of Ontario presenting later, so I don't want to steal too much of their thunder. We had an opportunity to meet with some folks from the North Bay OPP and the Temiskaming OPP. They've been very instrumental in what's going on in northeastern Ontario. Obviously, for the Let's Remember Adam campaign and the Ranger family, that's their home base, so to speak, in Mattawa, which is a small town about half an hour or 45 minutes—I see the smile on your face; I know you've been there—east of North Bay. We had a really great opportunity to talk with them. They've been doing some good work with Nipissing University, and we're going to hear from one of the students there who has actually done a thesis on this, as well, from the university. They've been really connecting and trying to figure out what this might mean, and they're big supporters of it. Like I said, they're the ones on the front lines with the bus drivers who are out there, trying to build awareness and trying to make sure that people understand what the rules are.

I think the thing that they're really excited about is the clarification piece on this, where you'll fully understand: When the amber lights are flashing, it means slow down, and when the red lights are on, you do not pass the bus from that point. It begins to eliminate a lot of the confusion that I talked about earlier, where if the bus has its red lights on but is still moving, technically you can still pass that school bus. This will really clear up a lot of that kind of

miscommunication. I think it will make it a lot easier for people to understand when they can't pass that bus, but it will also make it a lot clearer for law enforcement when they're observing in school zones or different areas in different neighbourhoods. When they have to lay charges and, ultimately, if they're to appear in court, it makes it a lot easier for them to explain their position.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I don't know if any of my other colleagues wanted to jump in, but if not I have another question. Is there—oh, there is. MPP Park.

0930

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Go ahead, MPP Park.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Thank you, MPP Harris, for bringing this bill. It's so wonderful to see.

My private member's bills had similar stories: You're doing meetings with your constituents, and an idea comes forward and you think, "Why hasn't this happened? How come it took so long for people to realize that this is a common-sense idea?" So I want to congratulate you on grabbing a hold of this important idea and bringing it forward to fruition.

I think you've already answered this, but I wanted to see if you had anything further to say on what you were able to find as to—are there any reasons why we shouldn't do this or why previous governments didn't do this?

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, I covered it mostly in my remarks. There doesn't really seem to be a reason other than, I guess, there have just been other priorities by other governments. It's great to see that our government, over the last year and a little bit since we brought this idea forward—and it does take a little bit of advocacy. Whether it be private members' bills or even government legislation or trying to find funding for our communities as members, whether it be members of the government or of the opposition or, really, any MPP here in this House, it takes a lot of advocacy to get things moving forward.

I don't know if the internal advocacy had been lacking previously, or if the other governments have just had other priorities. We really have not been able to find any key reasons or key indicators why this hasn't been done. The industry is very supportive of it. Law enforcement is supportive. Obviously, parents and safety advocates of children are very supportive. So I took the proverbial bull by the horns.

Being a parent of five—and I know you've had a chance to meet my kids, MPP Park. They're actually really excited, too. We talk about it any time we're out on the road. They see a school bus and they say, "Oh, Dad's trying to change the school bus lights to make it safer." It's neat how children can be so in tune with things like that. That's really the reason why I'm doing this and pushing it forward. I just want to make this safer for every child here in the province.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move on to the second round of questions with the opposition. MPP Yarde.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for bringing this forward. This is a

bill that we're obviously going to support and one which is long overdue. It is a little, I guess not sad—but the fact is that other provinces have put forward amendments to the school buses and have the amber-red lights, and it has taken us this long to actually do it. So I do commend the member for bringing it forward.

I want to highlight some of the comments that my colleague mentioned. I don't think we even got an answer to it—but why could we not add to this bill other safety measures, such as seat belts, and also maybe have an amendment to it mentioning the fact that now that we're in COVID-19, we could perhaps limit the capacity on school buses? Is there no room to do that, instead of just having to revisit this again, in terms of adding the seat belts to school buses?

Mr. Mike Harris: The seat belt issue on school buses is actually a little bit more complex than just adding it into a bill. There have been a lot of studies that have shown that it's actually not necessarily safer, if you can believe it, to have seat belts on school buses. I know the federal government is currently doing a pilot program across a few different areas of the country to investigate whether Transport Canada should look at mandating them. We certainly don't want to get in the way of that, as they're going forward with their studies.

Really, this bill focuses on the lights. That's my intention. It's a fairly simple and easy change to make. The industry is supportive. The law enforcement folks are supportive. The safety advocates are supportive. You and the other MPPs in the official opposition have been supportive. This is the focus that I'm taking with my private member's bill that we've done consultation on for over almost a year now, and that's the way we're going to move this forward.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): More questions? MPP Yarde, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Just out of curiosity: Do you know who will be doing the modification of these lights? Will it be an American company or will it be a Canadian company?

Mr. Mike Harris: School buses are manufactured all across North America, obviously. I think the vast majority of them are manufactured in the US. Any bus that actually comes into the province of Ontario has to be retrofitted specifically for the province of Ontario, because everywhere else in North America is already using the amber-red warning lamp system. That's an interesting piece. So any new buses will already be manufactured ready to rock and roll, so to speak.

As far as the changes to any current buses—the way the legislation is rolled out is that any bus manufactured after 2005 will have to move to the system. The reason the date is 2005 is because buses pre-2005 actually only have a four-lamp system. They don't use an eight-lamp system; it's only four red lights. The overwhelming majority of those buses are being phased out, and there's hardly any of them. If you're driving around and you see a school bus—they're almost all the same style, with the eight-lamp system. You don't really see any of the four-lamp buses

on the road anymore. It's the bus companies that will be making the changes. For example, Sharp Bus Lines is in MPP Bouma's riding. They will be making the changes at their garages and maintenance facilities. It will be all Ontario people, all local people doing the retrofits.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for more questions from the opposition. There are two minutes left, MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Just on the piece on the ages of the buses, and maybe not directly related to this bill—are you aware of the time limit on the number of years that school buses can be in service from their manufacture date and if that's also in line with what other provinces are doing in terms of their safety measures?

Mr. Mike Harris: As far as I'm aware, there's not necessarily a timeline; it's more about how the bus holds up over those years. Obviously, school buses are being used almost every day of the week, when you talk about five days a week for schoolchildren, and then often there are times when the bus might be chartered for an event on the weekend or field trips or other things. I think it's really more about the wear and tear on the bus than the actual time limit from manufacture. I could be wrong. If you have any more information on that, I'd love to hear it.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have a random fact in my head and I don't know where it came from. As a fun fact, my mom was actually a school bus driver for a few years, when I was a little girl. For some reason, I think that school buses have to be decommissioned after seven years for liability. I don't know why I think I know that or where that information came from or if it's still true, which is why I was curious.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm not 100% sure, and I don't want to say anything that I'm not 100% sure about. It's an interesting fact. We can certainly look into it.

The way that the industry has proposed this—the 2005 timeline really came from them, so I'd have to assume that's the impetus for the 2005 timeline.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll move on to the government for six minutes of questions. MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, MPP Harris, for taking the initiative. This is an important social policy that we need to adopt because it relates to the safety of our children, the safety of the future generation of Canadians.

Of course, all of us know that regardless of how many, how strict, bills and enforcement measures we adopt as legislators—the education aspect for drivers is an important element in this process.

I was wondering if you have any other ideas on what can we do to sensitize or educate drivers about the safety of our children, the safety of our buses, and to not break the law, but to uphold the law and save the children.

0940

Mr. Mike Harris: That's a great question.

I think that really is something that hits home for a lot of people—that education piece for drivers out there on the road.

I think, probably, the majority of us spend a lot of time travelling through our constituency and to different events. I've seen it first-hand, where people have driven right by a school bus. I just don't understand it. Maybe I'm a little bit more vigilant than others; I don't know. Maybe because I'm a parent and my child takes the bus every day, I'm a little more cognizant of seeing a big, 30-foot, giant, yellow bus with flashing lights—you'd think people would pay a little bit more attention, but ultimately, they don't.

I think from a legislator perspective, we've got a duty to make people aware of different things, obviously. We talk about advocacy campaigns a lot here in the Legislature. I know when we have members' statements, people are always talking about different community groups and things that are going on back home in their constituency. We've got a unique platform where we're able to really promote some of these.

We've done a lot of work with the Let's Remember Adam campaign over the last year or so, and helping to get their message out not only where they're based in northeastern Ontario, but also all across the province.

We're lucky; there are hundreds of us here at Queen's Park who have an opportunity to really push that message out about school bus safety.

I even had an opportunity with Minister Lecce, the Minister of Education, to do a media session with ethnic media all across the GTA. It was really great to see articles about school bus safety being put out in multiple languages across the province and across the GTA, where we have, obviously, a higher concentration of people who have come here from across the world and maybe English isn't their first or even second language.

So to be able to communicate—and I know, MPP Babikian, you're a great proponent of that. You do a lot of work with media that speak different languages and people in your community where English may not be their first language. Leveraging assets like that to be able to spread that message across communities is really important from our standpoint.

Thank you for the question.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Any more questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: I will pass it to MPP Bouma.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Chair. Do you know how much time I have left?

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): A little bit more than two minutes.

Mr. Will Bouma: That's plenty of time. Thank you very much, and through you: MPP Harris, thank you very much for bringing this common-sense legislation forward.

I'm intrigued, as an optometrist, about the fact that people can be confused by similar-coloured lights and people can get sucked into that.

As an active member of the fire service in the county of Brant for the last 13 years, I can tell you first-hand that if the lights are all the same colour, it gets more difficult for

motorists to be able to tell the difference. That's why on our firetrucks, we switched to the red-blue-and-white system. In fact, if you look at emergency vehicles across the province, they're all switching over to that. So it's very exciting for me to see this change to our buses.

On that topic, with the bus operators, I know Bill Sharp—a great local family. The family have been here for 200 years, on the farm where they live, and they also run a bus line.

I was wondering if you could expand a little more on what bus operators are actually telling you about this change.

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, absolutely.

First, I want to thank you for being part of debate when we had second reading. It was really great to get your perspective as a first responder, and not only that, but as a volunteer first responder. Thank you for everything that you've done for your community over the last number of years, helping to keep people safe. We saw during debate that sometimes it's not easy. Emotions can get the best of you. I just want to say thank you for taking part in that and everything that you are doing for your community and continue to do.

I don't know if everybody knows here, but MPP Bouma, even though he is still doing his legislative duties, still takes part in his local volunteer fire service every chance he gets.

So it's really great to see folks who are—and actually, MPP Kusendova, who is on the line here too, is still working as a nurse in her local hospital, which I think is fantastic. We have the opportunity to do these things even though we're here at Queen's Park.

But yes, listen, bus operators—and you're going to hear this, this afternoon—are really excited to see this change—

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you, MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Oh, that's it? Sorry.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Sorry, I was trying to wave at you, but you got going there.

We're going to go on to the last round of questioning; another six minutes, for the opposition. MPP Yarde.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you once again to the MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga. Obviously, we can't put a price on our children's lives, so I'm just curious if you have any figures or any dollar amounts as to how much it would cost to retrofit these vehicles.

Mr. Mike Harris: That was a big part of our consultation, trying to figure out what this would look like from an industry perspective. There's a very wide range, obviously, of buses and companies and how many buses each company has. It could be as simple as changing literally just the lens cap, which is four or six screws and is fairly inexpensive: roughly \$90 or less per bus. Going to some of the LED ones, the newer style, it's a little bit more expensive. It can be upwards of \$200 or \$300 per bus.

But I think one thing to really point out here is that the industry has been knowing or hoping that this was going to be coming down the road for a long time, and they've

been pretty adamant that they're happy to make these changes. There could be an opportunity down the road—this would be up to the different industry operators—to look and see whether they could work with the ministry to potentially make some funding available. Obviously, I'm sure you're aware, a private member's bill can't cost the government money, so there could be some opportunities down the road to be able to partner, but that would be up to the Ministry of Transportation and also the bus operators, to decide what road they want to go down. But I think if you total it up, it's about \$5 million industry wide, but it's not like it's just one operator that has to foot the bill for the whole thing; it's pieced out and spread out through multiple operators.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We have time for more questions. MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Hi. Thank you so much. I think my only last question at this point is: What guarantee do we have from your government that we're actually going to see this bill come back for third reading? You've seen this morning that you have broad support from your opposition colleagues. It's a pretty straightforward bill that I think we'd like to see pass just as much as you would, and really, the only thing gatekeeping that is your government's legislative agenda. So I just wonder if you have any comment about whether we'll see this bill come back for third reading once it's through the committee process.

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, absolutely. I think that's one thing—like you said, this really has very broad support from everyone, quite frankly, and it's a common-sense piece of legislation.

I like saying “common sense.” It reminds me of the Common Sense Revolution back in the 1990s. You may know somebody who led that.

Ms. Suze Morrison: You're making me roll my eyes here—

Mr. Mike Harris: But, no, in all seriousness, this is a priority for me. I'm advocating very fiercely to get this through. I believe we have clause-by-clause scheduled for next week. It appears as though there's a fairly accelerated timeline for this bill. I'm very hopeful that with my advocacy and, obviously, the advocacy from our other government members and, of course, the opposition, we'll be able to get this through very, very soon.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We have more time for questions. MPP Yarde.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's similar, along the lines of my colleague: Is there a good chance that we'll be able to get these retrofitted for September 2022, I guess, basically, is my question. You sort of answered it.

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, and I think we're going to hear—there may be a couple of amendments that get done based on some more consultation that we've done with the school bus industry over the last little while. I think you're going to hear from School Bus Ontario a little bit more, probably, this morning, about what these timelines are going to look like. But the intent is to get it done as soon as is feasibly possible.

Obviously, retrofitting—what did I say—18,000 school buses can take a little bit of time. Obviously, you need to get the parts in and you need to make sure that you have the ability to make those changes. But the intent is to get this done as soon as possible, MPP Yarde, so thank you for that.

0950

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Any more questions from the opposition? We still have a couple of minutes. MPP Yarde?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Are we going to be using similar retrofitting as, say, in Saskatchewan and other provinces, or are we going to go at it our own way? Will there be intense testing of these to make sure that they actually work—

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Less than one minute.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: —so we don't have an issue like we did with the licence plates, is what I'm saying.

Mr. Mike Harris: Everybody gets a job in today. It's good.

Listen, they still have to pass all the safety standards that a regular school bus would pass when they get out on the road—so, absolutely. As far as what the changes look like—and every jurisdiction has done it fairly similarly. It's all pretty straightforward changes. Like I said, new buses that are manufactured are already using this system, and they have to be retrofitted just for use only in the province in Ontario.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That's all the time we have for the opposition. We'll now move on to the government for six minutes of questions. MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you again, MPP Harris. Can you elaborate: What did you hear from the school bus operators in response to your bill? And how did they react to it?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you so much. That's great. I can build off of MPP Bouma's question. Listen, they were really excited to hear that there was a will from a government member and, ultimately, the government, as it appears, to move forward with this. They want to make their school buses as safe as possible. I think that's really the key here. But they can only do what legislation will allow. They've wanted to make this change for decades, realistically. The last province to come online was Newfoundland; I believe it was in 2014. The last state to come online was Wisconsin, in 2016. They've wanted to do this here in Ontario for a very long time, but the legislation states that they can't. They have to use the all-red system.

It's really, really great to hear from them that they're supportive of this and, obviously, that they want to see those changes. They've been very supportive also of stop-arm cameras, which are now able to be used as a sole source of evidence. You don't have to have a school bus driver or a passerby or a bystander or another driver on the road come to court to corroborate the evidence of a stop-arm camera. They were allowed to be used previously, but

you had to have somebody else actually confirm that someone had passed the bus.

It's great that they're adopting a lot of these—we'll call them new technologies, if you will. That includes the amber-red system. We're going to hear a little bit more—I don't want to, again, steal their thunder too, too much, because we're going to hear from some of those operators later today. But they're very supportive, and they're very excited to see any changes that we can make from a government perspective that will make school buses safer.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for more questions from the government. MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Chair, through you: MPP Harris, you may not know the answer to this question, but it seems to me that when the decision was made to change the lighting scheme to suit the most current scientific knowledge on emergency vehicles, like fire trucks and police cars and trucks, it didn't take a legislative change. I'm wondering if we could consider, just for the record, that perhaps it shouldn't take a private member's bill in order to make common-sense changes like that. I was wondering if I could just off-the-cuff pick your brain on your thoughts on an issue like that.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's interesting that you mentioned that, because the school bus safety part of this is actually written into the Highway Traffic Act, and that's what this bill does. It amends the Highway Traffic Act to be able to use the dual-lamp system.

It's not necessarily something that we really dug into too much, but it could be something that maybe someone like yourself or maybe you and I can look at talking to legislative research and seeing whether there's an ability to have the HTA amended to be able to do this without legislation going forward, if there are other emergency vehicles.

Let's just say, for example, that volunteer firefighters were encouraged to go to a green light and some other flashing light, just to add that awareness that they're responding to a call. I would assume that that currently has to be done via the Highway Traffic Act. I'm not sure, but it's certainly something, I think, that would be worthwhile looking into. To MPP Morrison's point about being able to make these changes a little bit quicker, that could be a good way of looking at that and seeing whether we might be able to do things a little bit more expediently if we ever have to do something like this again.

Mr. Will Bouma: We will continue to have that conversation. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize MPP Park, with just a bit more than one minute.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Okay. Just really quick, MPP Harris: What education of the public would need to be done when this changes? I assume that when people go get their driving test, there's some studying that happens at that point, when you're learning to become a driver. I wondered if you had put any thought into the training piece.

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, absolutely. That's certainly a big part of what's going to come when the regulations and

different things get built out with this. Obviously advocating with the DriveTest centres and educating our young drivers or newer drivers that this is what has to happen—obviously we’ll do a lot of social media pushes. I just saw some of our friends from some of our school bus organizations pop on here as well, and we’ll certainly be leveraging them to get the word out, and the different safety organizations, making sure that people are very aware. Hopefully we’ll get an opportunity to send a kit out to all the members of the Legislature, as well, where they can put things up on their social media to help educate drivers.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much. This concludes the time that we had for the presentation and the questions. Thank you, MPP Harris, for the presentation.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have the remainder of our presenters today, who have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, so each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we have heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. The time for questions will be broken down into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government and two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition.

I think that we have new members who have joined. I recognize that MPP Miller has joined us, so could you confirm that you are the honourable member and confirm your location?

Mr. Norman Miller: Hi. Yes, Chair. It’s Norm Miller, and I’m in Parry Sound.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Has anyone else joined? We’re good? All right. Are there any questions before we move on to the presenters? I see none. Okay. Thank you.

I will just remind the presenters that you can speak in the language of your choice, because we do have interpretation services.

LET’S REMEMBER ADAM:
STOP FOR THE SCHOOL BUS CAMPAIGN
POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
OF WATERLOO REGION

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will call on Mr. Pierre Ranger from the Let’s Remember Adam: Stop for the School Bus Campaign. You can start, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Pierre Ranger: Thank you very much, and good morning, everyone. My name is Pierre Ranger, and I am the chair of the Let’s Remember Adam: Stop for the School Bus Campaign.

For those of you who don’t know what our campaign is about, I’ll give you a quick briefing. On February 11, 2000, Adam Ranger was struck and killed while stepping

off the school bus and crossing the road to get home. He was just five years old when this happened, and it was our family home. The school bus was fully stopped, the stop arm was out and overhead red lights were activated; the driver simply did not stop. My other brother, Alex, was with Adam at the time. Alex was 13. He noticed the driver wasn’t going to stop, and he did try to reach out and grab Adam’s backpack, but failed and witnessed the whole tragedy happen before his eyes.

In 2004, the Let’s Remember Adam campaign was born with a thought from my mother, who just wanted to have something so that we could try our best to make sure that this tragedy never happened to anyone else and nobody had to lose another loved one or go through what we go through every day. In 2014, I was approached by the current committee at that time and asked if I was willing to take it over. At that time, I agreed to take it over; I thought that breathing new life into the campaign would be of benefit.

1000

Over the next few years, we focused on basically promoting Let’s Remember Adam in a safety aspect, giving a reason why it was so important to stop for the school bus, that reason basically being so you don’t lose somebody like we lost Adam. Over a few years, we realized that our message wasn’t doing enough and people weren’t getting it. Stop-arm violations were on the rise yearly, and it was only a matter of time before another incident happened—and they did happen, within the US and in other areas where children lost their lives because people didn’t stop.

At that time, my family and the committee decided to focus on trying to make some real safety changes to school buses. The original focus was on stop-arm cameras, and I’m happy to say that on January 12, which also would have been Adam’s 25th birthday, we saw stop-arm cameras installed on all buses in the Mattawa area, which is our hometown, and we’re working with several other municipalities and companies to try to get stop-arm camera systems installed on all buses in Ontario.

With that focus, the amber lights also come up. We decided we needed to try to do something with this as well. That’s why Let’s Remember Adam and the Ranger family are in full support of Bill 246, the Safer School Buses Act. This is a change that’s a long time coming and it’s something that really needs to happen. The red lights on the top of the school buses are a danger. It is confusing for drivers to know what that bus is doing. It’s all the same colour. Frankly, to me, it makes no sense.

We are the only province in Canada that has this archaic system of just red lights. It makes it even more difficult for that reason, because of out-of-province travellers. Where I live, in Mattawa, Highway 17 runs right through our town and Quebec borders us, so we constantly see out-of-province people come through our town. The majority of the incidents that we receive with stop-arm violations is because of out-of-province people. So that’s why we’re putting our full support behind Bill 246 and, like I said, this really needs to happen.

Yes, the Let's Remember Adam campaign and everybody involved fully understands there is going to be a cost to this, but it's a relatively low cost: around \$90 a bus, usually. Some bus companies have already purchased all the products needed to change these buses over, like Belanger Brownway Bus Lines here in Mattawa. They were told in 2013 that this change was coming and that they should start preparing for it, so they actually purchased all the products needed to change over their fleet at that time, and they've just been sitting in storage, so they're ready to go. As soon as this happens, it's basically pretty easy for them to switch out, and I've heard of other fleets that are in similar situations where they have planned ahead to make this happen.

It really all comes down to the bottom line of child safety. That's why we're doing this.

The red lights on the bus, like I said, are a danger. It's confusing. Anything we can do to make that bus safer for children is Let's Remember Adam's goal, and these amber lights and Bill 246, the Safer School Buses Act, is a massive change that would benefit children all across Ontario. Thousands and thousands of kids ride these school buses every day and we need to really do whatever we can to make it safer for them. Maybe that day, on February 11, if that bus would have had amber lights on it, maybe the driver would have noticed something else and stopped, and Adam would still be here today, but we'll never know that.

Again, I put my full support, my family puts their full support and the entire Let's Remember Adam campaign puts its full support behind Bill 246. That is all I have right now. Thank you very, very much.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll move on to the next presenter, Mr. Bruce Chapman from the Police Association of Ontario. Please state your name for Hansard, and then you may begin.

Mr. Bruce Chapman: Thank you very much. My name is Bruce Chapman, and I'm the president of the Police Association of Ontario. The PAO represents 46 local police associations and over 28,000 members across the province.

First of all, I want to offer my condolences to Pierre and his family on the tragic loss of their son.

I want to thank the committee today for allowing me to speak on Bill 246. The PAO is a leader in advocacy in policing and community safety in Ontario. We aim to forward provincial efforts that have potential impacts to our members in the communities we serve.

Every fall, the police association leaders from across Ontario gather in Toronto to meet with their local MPPs to discuss the priorities of the individuals who keep Ontario safe by providing professional policing to local communities. Last year, unfortunately, our event, of course, was virtual. During these meetings, members of the Waterloo police association were pleased to meet with MPP Michael Harris of Kitchener-Conestoga, where they learned about his commitment to the issue of school bus safety in Ontario.

As public safety professionals, our members are witness every day to the difference proper safety precautions can make to the lives of Ontarians, especially for children. We also see the consequences of inadequate precautions and safety measures that can make Ontario roads more hazardous for those we all want to protect. Our police personnel members who are dedicated to keeping our roads safe know that when the rules of the road are clear and drivers are able to easily identify the expectations of them, better outcomes result for everyone.

Today, under Ontario's one-colour model, red lights are utilized to convey two different messages. The first message is a warning that the school bus will be stopping soon. The second is a notice to drivers that the school bus has stopped, and children may be departing or boarding the bus. These two messages cannot be properly communicated through the same set of lights. Under Bill 246, the warning stage will be communicated through the use of amber lights, clearly cautioning that the bus driver is about to stop and pick up or drop off children. The second message is therefore meant to communicate one very important thing: Stop and do not pass, period.

At the PAO, we strive that any proposals we make or support are backed up by evidence. Ontario is the only jurisdiction that we are aware of in North America that currently does not use a dual-lamp system, and Transport Canada has shown that the amber-red light system is more effective in slowing down approaching vehicles.

If Bill 246 is passed into law, we anticipate that drivers will be better equipped to understand what a school bus is doing and, vitally, what it will do next. Drivers will have more time to adjust their speed and come to a stop when required. Our members are committed to assisting in educating the public about the changes if this becomes law. I think that's a very important aspect on the educational component of any changes to provincial or federal law.

We were very pleased to support this bill as it worked its way through the legislative process, and we were very vocal in our support from the beginning, as we remain today. We are very hopeful that this committee will agree that this bill represents a fairly easy change to safety procedures that will have a tangible, positive public safety impact.

With that, I want to thank the committee for their time.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We'll now move on to the next presenter. We have somebody from the Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region. Please state your name for the Hansard, and then you may begin.

Mr. Benoit Bourgault: Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to present. I'm Benoit Bourgault, the general manager at Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region. We transport 32,000 students every day, using 350 school buses with overhead lights.

Every day, we have reports of motorists not respecting school bus stops to pick up and drop off students. This is the most vulnerable time for students in transportation.

This is the biggest concern for people involved in student transportation.

There are several reasons for that. The current system of all-red lights is confusing. Let me illustrate the bus stop process: The driver approaches the stop. The driver activates the overhead lights. They're red. It doesn't mean to stop yet. The bus comes to a complete stop, opens the door. Now there's a whole set of lights—again red—that are flashing. Now it means for everybody to stop. But how should people know that? Next time you see a school bus, watch it, and you'll see that it goes from the inner light to the outer light. They're all designed for the amber system, but we don't use that.

What does it mean in real life? I'm coming across a school bus. The driver activates the lights as they're approaching the stop. The bus is still in motion. But I'm coming in the opposite direction. As I come by, I'm trying to stop, and the bus goes by, with the lights flashing. Am I in trouble? Did I risk a kid's life? What do I do? Do I slam the brakes? Do I get rear-ended? It's very, very confusing.

1010

But we can eliminate this confusion; yes, we can. Ontario is behind everywhere. Since 2004, every school bus built is built with the eight-lamp system—since 2004. That's more than 16 years ago. Since 2004, every jurisdiction in North America except for Ontario has transitioned and adopted the eight-lamp amber-red lights—again, except for Ontario. We are the only province that has yet to adopt the amber-red warning system—the only province.

Right now, we don't have to do a big retrofit with the buses, as the old models are all retired at this time. All we need to do is pop the four lamps, replace them with amber and change the wording on the back of the bus. This will save lives.

The school bus has not evolved since I rode the bus, and that's been a long time. We need to get with the times. This is the very first step in long-overdue changes.

Help make the life of the bus driver easier. The all-red light system is confusing. This causes the bus driver to try to manage how long the lights are flashing, before a stop, for oncoming traffic. It causes confusion. An amber-to-red light is simple: three to four seconds of amber, then the bus comes to a complete stop, then it turns to red. There's no confusion for all the road users. Think of the traffic light. It doesn't go from green to red. There's an amber that warns people that it's about to change.

Remember: The bus drivers are manoeuvring a very large vehicle in a tight space, managing traffic and ensuring safe crossings. They do that while they are supervising up to 72 students. They need help, and the solution is a proven one. Nine provinces, the territories and all 50 states have adopted the eight lamps. I ask you: Why is Ontario this late to the party? It's a simple change. It will reduce confusion. It will make it safer for students.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll now move on to the period of questions. We'll start with the government members for our first round of

seven and a half minutes. I have identified MPP Harris for questions.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to everybody here who has given a presentation this morning as our first round of presenters. I have had a chance, obviously, to meet with all of you and your organizations. I just wanted to thank you for your continued advocacy and support of this bill.

In the words of the Chair, Monsieur Ranger—because I always say “ranger” but let's say it Ranger today. I know that obviously we've had a chance to get to know each other a little bit better over these last few years. Growing up in North Bay, only about 40 minutes west of Mattawa where you guys live, I've seen the Let's Remember Adam billboards and remember the stories. Maybe that's also part of the reason why I'm a little bit more in tune to what's happening, because of your advocacy. I just wanted to say thank you for that, and thank you for the petition that you brought to Minister Fedeli's office. Unfortunately, ministers aren't allowed to read petitions in the Legislature, so he asked me if I would. That's when we started to move down this road of trying to figure out if this was something that we could do, and I'm so glad to see that it seems like it's coming to fruition.

But I wanted to talk a little bit about the town of Mattawa. Obviously you've been very progressive when it's come to school bus safety. They've implemented stop-arm cameras on, I think, all of their buses at this point, or close to it. We got a really great letter from them, actually, passing a resolution with town council this year supporting the transition to the amber-red light system. I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the support that the town of Mattawa and the surrounding townships have given you over the last little while and what you think that means in helping to move this bill forward.

Mr. Pierre Ranger: Sure. Thank you for your kind words.

The town of Mattawa is 100% in full support of anything that benefits school buses, especially Bill 246. When I say that I and my family lost my brother Adam, the whole community did.

The town of Mattawa has been in support of Let's Remember Adam since day one, and they are in full support of these amber lights. From the bus company to the schools to the consortium in our area, everybody I've spoken to is 100% on board to get this done. They all believe the same thing: that it makes no sense that we don't have this on our buses already, that it would clean up the confusion around school buses. I've never met anyone who had anything negative to say about this program being put on our buses. So as far as local support in my area, it's 100% across the board.

Mr. Mike Harris: One of the questions that has come up a couple of times today is why this change hasn't been made or really talked about as much as it is right now with this bill. Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Pierre Ranger: No. I honestly don't know. Like previous presenters said, school buses haven't changed since I rode them. For as long as I can remember, school

buses haven't changed. I think it's just something that got pushed aside and forgotten about. Nobody was complaining about it, nobody was making an issue about it, so nobody thought, "Let's make some changes." But it's gone far too long, and now is the time to actually make some significant changes and save some children's lives.

We're just lucky that in this area, we haven't seen another tragedy. There have been a lot of close calls, and it's just a matter of time. I can't stress that enough: It's a matter of time. We need to do something. That's why Mattawa was in full support of getting those cameras on. Like I said, the bus lines in my area have the equipment ready to go to do this. They could literally do it in a couple of days, a weekend. They could have all the buses retrofitted with amber lights.

I'm in full support. I honestly don't know why it hasn't happened yet.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you.

I think MPP Hogarth had a question, if there's time.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Yes, there is more time for questions. MPP Hogarth.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Once again, thank you to MPP Harris for bringing this bill forward. I think it's such an important topic.

Mr. Ranger, I just want to share my condolences. I have seen the signs. I have in-laws who live up in the Sudbury area, and I've driven on those highways and I have seen those signs. If you hear the story behind them, it is such a tragic loss for you and your family. Any loss of any child is a community's loss. So once again, my heart goes out to your family, but thank you for bringing this forward.

My question is for Mr. Chapman. Bruce, it's always nice to see you. Thank you for your work, and I just want to share our thanks to all your team members, all those officers who keep us and all Ontarians safe every day. Please pass along our thanks for the work that they do.

My question is about speeding traffic on local roads. We always see people whizzing by. We hope that they do stop. Any education that we can give our drivers so they're not speeding past these school buses—we talk about it. We talk about—people know. People know they should stop. It's similar to when we see streetcars here in Toronto. People know they should stop. How do we get that message across, and can you elaborate on other ways that the PAO promotes school bus safety?

Mr. Bruce Chapman: Yes. Thank you very much for those kind words, on behalf of all our members. We really appreciate it and the support of the government as we move forward.

I can speak in general terms. The educational component is critical to the success of changes to legislation, whether it be provincial or federal. Your points were right on about, whether it be streetcars or whether it be speeding, the police can only be in so many places at so many times.

One of the tools that police personnel have is the ability to warn drivers rather than issue a ticket, if it's appropriate. That may be the start of the educational component that could be used as we transition to it, that we stop these

drivers. Because as has been explained by all of the presenters, it is very hard as the school bus is slowing and those red lights come down: "Do I stop? Do I go?" Personally, even as a police officer, at what time do I make that decision on if it's safe to continue, because it hasn't come to a complete stop. That is one of the biggest issues facing us that I think would be resolved with the amber-light or the dual-light system. Therefore, police personnel have in the past actually sat on school buses to catch those drivers who don't obey the law, by forwarding and radioing in the information to those who break the law and issuing the ticket.

1020

So there are a number of methods and means. A lot of police services have traffic safety divisions. We also go into the schools in a lot of the communities around the province—

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Mr. Bruce Chapman: —to be able to educate the—

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Mr. Chapman, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to interrupt you. We are done for the first round of questions, but there will be more questions, I'm sure.

We're going to move on to the opposition for 7.5 minutes of questions. I recognize MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank all of the presenters for their comments and contributions here today.

I think I want to start with Pierre. First off, I want to say that I'm so sorry for your family's loss. No family should have to go through what you went through, and I think it's incredibly powerful that your family has taken something absolutely tragic that you've been through and channelled that into effecting positive change in our province, and not just in your community, but across the province. I think that that is truly phenomenal and an incredible act of service, considering everything that you've been through.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for the advocacy that you and your family have undertaken to make sure that no other family goes through what you've been through. Just before I start out, I wanted to say that.

Mr. Pierre Ranger: Thank you.

Ms. Suze Morrison: You know, I don't have a ton of questions, because at the end of the day, this is a pretty straightforward thing that everyone has made a clear case for, and I don't think anyone in this room is in opposition to the measures that have been proposed. So I think I'd like to just give you a few minutes of my time if there's anything beyond the scope of the bill that we're looking at today that your family is perhaps advocating for, in addition to the changes to the lights that we're looking at within this bill, that would improve school bus safety for children beyond what we're looking at today, to help us prepare for any future changes we might need to look at beyond the scope of this bill.

Mr. Pierre Ranger: No, currently the only other thing we're pushing is the stop-arm camera systems, and everything has already been put through for that. So no, right now, as we look at it, basically the way a school bus runs, if you added the camera systems—they're not just a

stop-arm; they're full camera systems. They make the bus basically a smart bus—at least the ones here in Mattawa are.

If you add that, with the amber lights, I just think the buses will be 100% safer than they are now—not that they're dangerous death traps by any means, but to the general public, and especially new drivers or older drivers, it is very confusing, what's going on with these buses. To be totally honest, I've even had OPP who weren't 100% sure of what was supposed to go on with these buses as far as the red lights flashing.

As far as new projects or other changes to be made to a bus, at this time, we don't have anything we're focusing on. We're just trying to get these amber lights on and get cameras on the buses, and make it better for the children riding these buses, the public that's travelling around these buses and bus drivers, who have way more responsibility than I have in my day-to-day work. My heart goes out to these drivers, and I think all these changes would benefit everyone.

Thank you for your kind words. They're appreciated.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have to say, thank you for recognizing the drivers as well. I don't know if you were on for the earlier session, but I did mention that when I was a young girl, my mom was actually a school bus driver for a few years, and she has a lot of good stories from her time there. She really quite enjoyed it.

I think I'll take a minute to ask, really, a similar question to the folks from the Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region. Again, I don't have a ton of technical questions, because this is, like I said, a pretty straightforward bill that, as the opposition members, we're certainly in support of. I guess I will just invite you to add: Are there any future pieces that you folks are looking at in terms of school bus safety that are perhaps beyond the scope of the current bill that we're looking at, that you folks will be turning your attention to, hopefully once this bill is passed, so that we can anticipate anything in the pipeline that you folks are looking at in terms of school bus safety?

Mr. Benoit Bourgault: Good morning. Thank you. That's a very good question. Student safety is by far my first priority. Currently, we are doing a pilot on seat belts. As I said, it's amazing the school bus has virtually not evolved since I rode it 50 years ago or so. There's a lot of controversy around seat belts. We hear all the challenges and the difficulties that it presents. Yet when we look south of the border, in every single jurisdiction that has started with seat belts, they were saying the same thing as we're saying now: "You lose capacity. It takes time. It's dangerous. How is that going to work?" And yet, a few years later, all the drivers are saying, "I would never drive a bus without seat belts anymore."

So this is the next thing, for us, that we're looking at. We're doing the pilot this year. We have seven buses equipped with seat belts. It's a difficult year to do a pilot. I have not heard a single word from any school or any bus driver about the seat belts. We have not been able to go out to interact with students, to interact with drivers

because of COVID; however, my phone—I have not received a single comment. I think it speaks volumes to what seat belts are, and the barriers are not what they should be.

We will need funding for that in the long term, but it's not that much. Again, what's the life—it's not about death, it's about injuries. I invite you to google on YouTube "school bus collision without seat belts." There are a lot of buses equipped with internal cameras now, and you will see a lot of it. There was one a little over a year ago in Michigan. I have shown that to people and I have asked, "Pick a seat. Tell me where you want to sit in that bus." They all pick the driver's seat, because that's the only place that they had a seat belt. Everybody is thrown out of their seats and they pile up. It's not pretty. Seat belts prevent injuries. Again, 20 stitches in the face could be devastating for a young child. Whether it's a girl or a boy, they're marked for life. That can happen very easily.

Stop-arm cameras are another thing that we're working with the region to try to move forward, but we need to help people stop. Again, stop-arm cameras don't stop everybody, because there are three kinds of infractions. There's the person that does it because they don't think they're going to get caught—those will stop. But there is the person who is distracted. Stop-arm cameras aren't going to stop that. They may raise awareness, may raise attention. And there's the third party who doesn't know—

La Vice-Présidente (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Merci, monsieur Bourgault. Désolée de vous interrompre.

We need to move on to the next round of questions, so seven and half minutes for the government. MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you: Bruce, thank you for joining us today. Great to see you here. I was wondering if I could pick your brain a little bit and your expertise on the importance of having different-coloured lights. We use those—I'm a volunteer firefighter in the county of Brant. On our trucks now, we have red and blue. I know the police do that too. I was wondering if you could give your thoughts on the idea of how having different-coloured lights aids drivers to see that there's something going on that they need to slow down for.

Mr. Bruce Chapman: Absolutely. Thank you very much, MPP Bouma. The PAO was a big proponent and advocate when we lobbied and advocated to the previous government about the need for dual lights on police vehicles, that being red and blue. Any position that the PAO takes as an organization is always evidence-based, and there was evidence to back up the safety of the dual lights. There were some, I'll say, substantial costs in police vehicles to equip them from all red to the red and blue as a safety mechanism. But it has had measurable results since it came into effect, and I have no doubt—and that's why we fully support the dual lights on buses, because we believe that the evidence will clearly dictate a similar decrease in tragedies that we have had. Like we said, Ontario is the only one in North America that has not adopted it. Everybody else can't be wrong, would be my rationale behind it. I liken it to the identical situation of

what we did with police vehicles a number of years ago in the switch.

1030

Mr. Will Bouma: If I could dig into that a little bit deeper, because we started a bit of a conversation about that with MPP Harris a little bit earlier, was there a legislative change necessary for police vehicles to have to switch to a different lighting system? Or was that something that could just be done administratively, with the idea that if—why do we have to have a legislative change to make buses safer? Can there not be a way that that could be done in regulations, when scientific evidence clearly shows [*inaudible*] So I was wondering if you knew: Was that a legislative change, or was that something that could just be done by police services?

Mr. Bruce Chapman: I believe it required a legislative change. Now, it was a little bit before my time with the provincial organization, although a fellow board member of Peel when I was a member there, Bob Baltin, was one of the biggest advocates. He was the part-time Peel provincial president and he was our advocate, as the provincial president, behind that change. I'm pretty sure it was a legislative change that was required, because the Highway Traffic Act had red lights in it and needed to be legislatively changed. I assume that this would be the same process and why the introduction of Bill 246 and not a regulatory change, although I can't specifically speak on that.

Mr. Will Bouma: All good. We will dig into that further.

If I can turn my attention to Benoit: Thank you very much for joining us. I appreciate having your expertise at the table this morning. I was wondering, because we had talked about that a little bit earlier also, the age of school buses, because I think this change goes back to 2005 or something like that. Can you give any more information? How old can a bus be on Ontario's roads? If you could just fill out a little bit more on that and take that wherever you would like to take that.

Mr. Benoit Bourgault: Thank you—a very good question. Typically, it's 12 to 13 years. There are some exceptions that go to 14 or 15 years, but it does not exceed 15 years in the province. There would be very few exceptions.

From a cost perspective—and I think with the delay, from what I heard, because I joined this field 12 years ago and we were talking about the amber-red. But it was a question of cost because there were too many buses with only two overhead lights, in the front and in the back. We all had the magic 2017 in mind as the turning point, where some would retire buses a little quicker than normal because it was not worth the cost to retrofit. But 2017 came and went, and we didn't make the change. We're long past due now and as far as I know, there aren't any buses that have two overhead lights, in the front and back, at this point in Ontario. If there are, they should be retired anyway.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you. Madam Chair, I've probably hogged too much time on this round, but I will leave it to my colleagues.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Are there any more questions? There are still two minutes left for our government members. I see MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Sure. Mr. Chapman, thank you, obviously, for being part of this today. I know that we've had many great conversations over the last few years, yourself and I, and also with members from the local Waterloo region police services representation within your association. We had an opportunity to speak with some of the folks from WRPS and they were very supportive of this. Mark Hammer, who I believe heads up the local traffic unit, was talking a little bit about the clarity piece, and I think everyone sort of touched on this a little bit, including yourself earlier.

I wondered if you could elaborate a little bit more on really what it means to have those two-coloured lights, and how it makes it easier, obviously, for your officers to understand where and when they can lay charges. I think one of the interesting things that has come out from some of the research we've done here is that, under the current regulations, it states that the bus, obviously, has to be stopped, with the red lights flashing. If the bus is still moving and the lights are on, you can still pass it. People are using that as an argument to get out of tickets. I know we don't have much time left, but if you could touch on that quickly.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): With 45 seconds.

Mr. Bruce Chapman: Excellent. Thank you. It shouldn't take more than that. There's a very clear delineation between amber and red: Amber means the school bus will be moving—very clear that a driver can pass the vehicle. When those red lights flash, the vehicle is stopped, and therefore it would be appropriate to lay a charge. Very clearly, there's no interpretation between an officer and the driver on whether the school bus was actually stopped. This would eliminate any doubt on anybody's part, including the judicial system.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Well done on the timing. We'll move on to the last round of questioning for the opposition members. I recognize MPP Yarde.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the participants here as well. I also want to send my condolences to Pierre Ranger on the loss of your son.

My question is to Bruce. Bruce, it's always good to see you. I appreciate all the work that you and your members do. I just want to touch on something you spoke about earlier in terms of education. I know with the street lights, when we implemented years ago the countdown signal—15 seconds, 14 seconds, 13 seconds—a lot of people use that as a time to speed or get through the intersection. Is there any concern with the amber light that drivers may want to use that as an option to speed past the bus because they know that once the red light comes, they're going to have to stop? Is that something that you've investigated through other provinces to see if that's a concern in terms of safety?

Mr. Bruce Chapman: Specifically, no. I say that because I think it will always be driver discretion on

anything, whether it's speeding in general—"I'm okay. I don't think there's going to be a radar anywhere and I will speed." That is always at the discretion of the driver at hand, sometimes with the experience they have, sometimes with the lack of experience they have. The same could be said with the yellow light and the red light.

I think with the intersections, on the timing of it, you are correct in that. But I think it fades more and it is a measureable option to stop in time. In addition to that, as we know, there are red-light cameras at intersections of those high-risk collision centres that definitely will trigger charges being laid and tickets issued for those who disobey the law by entering that intersection after the light has turned red. It is of assistance to police personnel because, again, it gets away from the opinion or position of an officer without evidence to back it up—"Well, it was still red," or "It was yellow," or "I entered before it turned red"—and leaving it to the judicial system to make the determination whether the evidence of the officer is correct or the rationale and reasoning of the driver is correct. I think this is an easily measurable result to be able to solve that. The light was red means the school bus was stopped, and there is no issue. It's clearly defined. That is one of the clear values of this.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Yarde, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you, Bruce. My next question is for Benoit. I'm not really sure how the mechanics of the amber-red works inside the bus. How does it work? Does the bus driver push a certain button? How does it actually work in terms of going from yellow to red? Do they have to push two different buttons, or does the fact that the bus is slowing down engage the lights? How does it actually work?

Mr. Benoit Bourgault: A very good question. The driver activates the early warning—all buses in North America are built like that—as they are about to stop. The bus comes to a complete stop. As the door opens—it's interlocked with the door. The stop arm extends. The over head switches from the inner to the outer, and the door opens. So it's interlocked with that door. The driver does not choose which one. The driver chooses how long the early warning is on, and that's it. That becomes complicated today because they're managing traffic. Because it's all red, to prevent collisions, they're playing with that. Going to amber—we're all accustomed to it. An amber light is three to four seconds. That's going what we're going to do, three seconds. We activate the lights about three seconds before we stop, we come to a complete stop, open the door, then it goes to red.

1040

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Any more questions from the opposition members? We still have three minutes to go. I see none. Oh, MPP Morrison, you can go ahead.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Sorry, I didn't get my camera on fast enough. I just wanted to go back to Mr. Bourgault—I don't know how to say your last name. In the last round of

questioning, you had started saying that there were three types of infractions, and I just wanted to give you a chance to finish that thought.

Mr. Benoit Bourgault: So as I said, there's the person who wilfully passes the bus because they think they're not going to get caught; there's the person who's distracted, they're texting or not paying attention; and third, there's the person who is ignorant of the law. Again, the more we talk about school buses, as we make changes like that, it's a way to raise awareness. It's a way to improve safety.

Obviously, with stop-arm cameras, the person will get one ticket and they'll learn very quickly. That helps. But the stop-arm camera does not physically stop vehicles, and there's always—you can't rely solely on the stop-arm cameras to save lives. It is a good deterrent, but it's only a deterrent. The distracted driver will continue to be distracted. Maybe a \$500 fine will wake them up and they'll pay a little more attention, but it may be too late. That's really the risk we see.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Yes. I represent a community in downtown Toronto, and one of the things that we struggle with here that I think is a little bit similar is getting folks to stop for open streetcar doors. It's something that only we deal with. The only place in Ontario that drivers have to navigate this is in Toronto, mostly in downtown. Drivers that are not from the city will come in and not realize that you have to stop for those open doors on a streetcar, similar to a school bus.

I know the municipality has undertaken a number of initiatives to try to address this. I know we're at the point where we have yield signs now on the backs of our streetcars and really quite obvious instructional signage. Is that something that's been looked at similarly for school buses, in terms of having yield signs on the back with explicit instructions on how to navigate these stops for drivers as an education piece?

Mr. Benoit Bourgault: Well, currently, on the back of a school bus, it says, "You must stop when the lights are flashing red and the bus is stopped." That would change with the amber, because then it will be simple: You have to stop when the red lights are flashing, period. It's always a challenge. I don't have a solution for that.

Ms. Suze Morrison: No, I hear you, and I know the city of Toronto struggles with this all the time with our streetcars. It's a different context, but really similar issues: How do we educate drivers to really understand what they need to do in these situations? How do we hold them accountable, and how do you enforce it? Like I said, I think this bill is a good step, but obviously open to any other recommendations or comments on things we should be looking at beyond the scope of this bill to be improving school bus safety. I just want to thank you for that.

Chair, I—

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much. We're out of time. This concludes this group of presentations. I want to thank every presenter for really great, informative presentations.

Mes sincères condoléances aussi à M. Pierre Ranger.

I hope you have a great rest of your day, and we're going to move on.

Before, actually, we move on to the next group of presenters, we're going to take a brief recess of 10 minutes. If we can all resume and come back at 10:55, that would be great. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1044 to 1059.

SCHOOL BUS ONTARIO
ONTARIO ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS,
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

MS. MEGAN ODD

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Welcome back, everyone. We're going to proceed with our next group of presenters. Not everyone is here yet, but we do have one of the groups that is here, so I'm just going to briefly explain. We're going to have each presenter make their presentation on a seven-minute time allocation, and then we'll proceed with two rounds of questions from the government and then the opposition for seven and a half minutes each.

We can start, then, with School Bus Ontario. You'll have seven minutes for your presentation. I would ask you to identify yourself for Hansard and then you may begin.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Okay. Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify about the Safer School Buses Act, Bill 246. My name is Nancy Daigneault. I'm the executive director of School Bus Ontario, SBO for short, representing 130 school bus operators in Ontario—small, medium and large companies.

Every day, we transport over 833,000 students on over 20,000 school bus vehicles to and from school safely. Safety is our number one priority at SBO. Because of this, we're very pleased to support this private member's bill tabled by MPP Mike Harris Jr., and we applaud him for his leadership. We're hopeful the Legislature recognizes the importance of this bill and passes it to improve safety on the roads, and for students. Today, we will review for you several reasons why we believe this bill is so important.

1100

First, we know that the number of people who pass school buses when they're stopped, red lights flashing, continues to be a problem in Ontario. In the business, we call them "blow-bys." It's when a vehicle blows by the bus despite it being stopped with its red lights flashing. The law now says that when the wheels come to a complete stop and the overhead red lights are flashing, motorists must stop. Unfortunately, in many cases, they do not. Statistics are not collected on the number of blow-bys, but we do know that it happens every single day in every single jurisdiction in Ontario. It's dangerous.

Moving to an amber warning that signals to drivers that the school bus is about to stop will help reduce this problem. We know it will help because the evidence from

other jurisdictions that have adopted this system proves that it works. The amber light warning is similar to traffic lights, which warn motorists that a red light is coming. It helps to slow the traffic, and motorists are more likely to stop when the school bus does indeed stop.

Second, Transport Canada has studied the issue, and in analyzing pilots and data from other jurisdictions, it's concluded that the amber lights do slow down traffic. It finds: (1) that amber lights are 11% more effective at reducing speed than the red lights alone; (2) the 11% figure reduces speed by at least 10 kilometres per hour from initial speed at the beginning of the advance signal in all locations and under all road conditions. Average reductions in speed are between 28 kilometres per hour and 32 kilometres per hour with amber lights. With only the red lights, the reduction in speed is 10 to 12 kilometres per hour.

Transport Canada recommends the amber advance warning system be mandatory across the country. Ontario is the last province to move toward the system and, again, we thank MPP Mike Harris Jr. for advancing this cause.

The system, however, does come with some costs. School buses will require lens changes from red to amber. With over 20,000 school buses in Ontario requiring upgrades, we estimate the cost to be approximately \$5.8 million, which is a small sum when it comes to improving safety on school buses. SBO is therefore asking the members of the committee to advocate for us in helping us secure the funding necessary.

School bus operators have worked diligently to ensure the health and safety of schoolchildren for decades. We welcome this opportunity to work with you on this further safety initiative.

Now I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Robert Monster.

Mr. Robert Monster: Mr. Chair and members of the committee: Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Robert Monster. I'm a professional engineer and I have dealt with school bus safety matters since 1998, first as the former senior vehicle standards engineer for the Ministry of Transportation, second as a member of the Canadian Standards Association technical committee on school buses, commonly referred to as the D250 committee—this is the committee that produces the D250 standard that was adopted into law by provincial governments across Canada, including here in Ontario—and third in my capacity with School Bus Ontario supporting the association and its members on vehicle safety related matters. In my capacity as I listed above, I have worked towards the adoption of the eight-lamp amber-red system that is now being proposed; I applaud the government for proposing this move to improve school bus safety.

School Bus Ontario has three suggestions for amendments to the bill that I would like this committee to consider.

First, we would recommend an effective date of August 1, 2022, as opposed to the current date of September 1, since that date would provide most flexibility for the industry that must undertake the physical conversion of

the buses and also provides for reasonable and effective compliance enforcement. Some buses will continue to be required over the summer, and a cutover date of August 1 provides for pre-conversion buses to be used prior to the cutover and already converted buses to be used after the cutover. Since some schools start up in the last week of August, a September 1 effective date is problematic.

Second, one of the advantages of changing the pre-warning signal from the current red to amber is that it provides a clear, distinct and easy-to-understand point at which motorists are required to stop for the school bus. The simple message is: Red means stop. Whether or not the buses come to a full stop does not need to be determined. The current wording on the rear of the school bus, “Do not pass when signals flashing,” can be misleading and does not take advantage of the new amber-red warning system that it provides.

The prescribed wording in the national school bus standard is “Do not pass when red lights flashing,” wording that complements the new system and emphasizes stop on red—very much like a traffic light. Further, this is the wording prescribed in all the provinces other than Quebec, which uses a French message. We recommend that the bill include a requirement for the signage on all school buses to be changed to the national standard, “Do not pass when red lights flashing.”

Third, we recommend that this committee consider a requirement to transition all school buses to the new amber-red system. The remaining number of pre-2005 school buses with only four lamps is now already extremely small and it will be even more so in September 2022 when the transition occurs. It is this remaining small number of buses that prevents the government from making rules of the road that treat all school buses the same.

Today, we cannot do safety marketing that tells motorists one simple message: Red always means stop. Today, as long as any school bus with red-only lamps remain in service, the message is: Stop if the red lights are flashing and the school bus has come to a complete stop. We are the last jurisdiction in Canada and the US to make this change. Let’s make it complete. I hope you look favourably on these proposed amendments. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We’ll move on to the next presenter. Since maybe you were not there at the beginning, I’ll just indicate that you have seven minutes for your presentation, and after we’ve heard from the remaining presenters, we’ll move on to two rounds of questions from the members.

I would ask the Ontario Association of School Business Officials transportation committee—you have seven minutes for your presentation. Please state your name for Hansard and you may begin.

Mr. Roy Wierenga: Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity on this important issue of student safety and the Safer School Buses Act. My name is Roy Wierenga. I’m the manger of transportation at Student Transportation of Peel Region. Our organization is

responsible for the daily transportation of approximately 68,000 students to and from school within Peel region.

I’m here today to speak to you on behalf of the Ontario Association of School Business Officials transportation committee, of which I am a member. The OASBO transportation committee is made up of transportation managers from consortia all across the province, and we service the transportation needs for 72 school boards in Ontario. Collectively, we are responsible for the daily transportation of over 800,000 students to and from school each day in Ontario.

The OASBO transportation committee is very concerned that Ontario is still the only province that has not yet adopted the eight-way amber-red school bus warning light system. The OASBO transportation committee has written twice to the Ministry of Transportation to raise our concerns over this important student safety issue.

As part of my presentation, I would like to now present copies of these two letters, and I will refer/speak to them to raise our specific concerns. At this point, I just want to confirm if the committee has received the documents from the OASBO transportation committee.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Yes.

Mr. Roy Wierenga: Okay. I’ll continue.

Every school day in Ontario, over 800,000 students are transported to and from school on a school bus or a school van. Ontario’s 72 school boards and 33 transportation consortia take great pride in the excellent safety records demonstrated by school bus operators province-wide.

As school transportation professionals, we all know that the most critical moments for student safety begin the moment the driver activates their warning lights as the bus approaches a bus stop to pick up and drop off students.

According to the Ministry of Transportations website: “School bus travel is very safe in Ontario. Injuries and fatalities, which are very rare, happen more often outside the school bus as students are boarding and leaving the bus or crossing the street.”

In Ontario, school bus drivers have to rely on a red-light warning system that they activate to provide advance warning to other motorists as they approach a bus stop to alert them that they’re about to stop on the roadway to drop off or pick up students. This advance warning is extremely important to let motorists know that the school bus is about to stop on the roadway.

1110

Unfortunately, the current red light warning system is extremely confusing for motorists, resulting in unnecessary safety risks for our students. For example, often motorists meeting a school bus will make an immediate panic stop as soon as the bus driver activates the overhead red lights, not realizing that the bus is still in motion and the driver is simply providing advance warning that the bus is about to stop. This situation is even more serious on highways with higher speed limits and especially with heavy truck traffic. School bus drivers must carefully time when they activate their overhead red warning lights to reduce the possibility of catching a driver off guard and making a sudden panic stop at a high rate of speed.

What is even more confusing for the public is that, under the current school bus stopping laws, most motorists do not realize that they do not have to stop for a school bus when its red lights are flashing unless the bus is completely stopped. We need to act to remove any confusion surrounding our current all-red light school bus stopping laws. We can do this by adopting the eight-way amber-red light warning system. By adopting an eight-way amber-red light warning system, our school bus drivers would be able to activate amber warning lights, instead of red lights, to provide advance warning that they are about to stop their school bus on the roadway. The flashing amber lights would send a much clearer indication to the motorists that the bus is still in motion and is about to stop. This would reduce the possibility of someone making a panic stop or losing control of their vehicle—and this is happening today. Once the bus is stopped, the driver would turn off the amber lights, which would automatically activate the red warning lights, which then sends a clear message to all motorists to stop.

The eight-way amber-red warning system is a much more logical and easier-to-understand concept for the general public compared to the current all-red stopping laws in Ontario. The general public understands that red lights mean “stop,” and amber lights mean “caution,” “slow down,” and “be prepared to stop.”

So what is the difference between the current all-red warning light system in Ontario to the eight-way amber-red warning system? Since 2005, all school buses and vans must be manufactured with an eight-lamp warning system, as per D250 specifications. These buses all have eight warning lights: four upper warning lights in the front and four at the rear of the bus. The only difference is that in Ontario, all eight warning lights are red. I have provided the committee with some illustrations to show the current Ontario school bus with the all-red warning light system.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We won't be showing your presentation on the screen, but the members have received that.

Mr. Roy Wierenga: Thank you. I've also provided illustrations of school buses operating in other provinces with the eight-way amber-red warning light system that clearly shows the two inside lights at the front of the bus and the back of the bus are amber lights instead of red.

What would it take to convert all Ontario school buses to an eight-way amber-red light warning system? Due to the fact that all school buses/vans manufactured since 2005 already have an eight-way warning lamp system, it would be a relatively simple and inexpensive conversion to replace the two inside red lens caps at the front and rear of the school bus with amber lens caps. This simple conversion would apply to most buses operating in Ontario today.

However, it must be noted that for certain model buses with the newer LED-type warning light systems, these would require the change-out of specific components within the flashing light system. This would involve more work and additional cost than just changing out lenses.

However, the cost is relatively inexpensive as these buses are all manufactured with eight-way warning light wiring.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize, Mr. Wierenga. We've just passed the seven-minute mark for your presentation. There will be questions after the presentations; maybe you will have a chance to complete.

We'll now move on to the next presenter. We have Megan Odd. If you can state your name for the Hansard, you may begin. You also have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Megan Odd: Thank you. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak directly to the committee regarding Bill 246, the Safer School Buses Act, 2021. My name is Megan Odd, and I am currently a sociology graduate student at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario. I'm here today to speak in favour of the passing of the Safer School Buses Act, which would further lead to the implementation of the eight-lamp amber-red advance warning light system on all school buses in Ontario.

I was first introduced to the concept surrounding amber-red advance warning lights in the beginning of the fourth year of my undergraduate degree in August 2019, when our department's placement coordinator contacted me with a research opportunity with the North Bay Ontario Provincial Police and a local school bus company. They were looking for someone willing to conduct research in partnership with them, focusing on establishing the severity of the problem that our province is facing pertaining to the rates at which motor vehicle operators are failing to stop for stopped school buses, with the proposed solution of implementing the amber-red advance warning light system. Of course, I jumped at the opportunity not only to gain valuable research experience, but with the hopes of influencing important policy change.

The issue surrounding motorists neglecting to stop for stopped school buses is not new to our province. It appears that, regardless of the consequences drivers are faced with, these incidents continue to happen. Throughout my research, I was tasked with determining the frequency with which drivers illegally pass a stopped school bus in Ontario. I was appalled when my results showed that each day, approximately 30,000 drivers fail to stop for stopped school buses. That's 30,000 times every single day that a student's life is being put at risk.

The sad reality is that our province has seen the worst-case scenario an unfortunate number of times. In September 1982, a student lost their life at the age of 16 after they sustained serious injuries following a collision that resulted from a motorist failing to stop for the bus lights. In June 1988, another child lost their life to acute traumatic injury to their central nervous system with cervical spinal cord lacerations. They were struck while crossing the road to board their school bus. They were only four years old. A nine-year-old child was struck and killed while exiting their school bus in October 1988 as well.

More recently, on February 11, 2000, Adam Ranger was struck and killed by an oncoming vehicle that failed to stop. Adam was only five years old. Since Adam's

untimely death, the Let's Remember Adam: Stop for the School Bus Campaign has been launched and run by Adam's older brother Pierre to advocate for school bus safety.

The responsibility to advocate for school bus safety and legislative change should not fall on the families of the students who have lost their lives. The onus should be on those in charge of making the provincial decisions to recognize the severity of the problem we are facing and work to create change to eliminate that problem, including implementing the amber-red light system.

Ontario is currently the only province within our country that has not yet implemented this lighting system. As a means to gain a law enforcement perspective from other provinces where the advance warning light system has already been implemented, I reached out to various Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers across the country.

Corporal Lisa Croteau with the Halifax District RCMP confirmed that although the implementation of the amber-red lights approximately 50 years ago has not entirely erased the problem of motorists illegally passing a stopped school bus, it has played a big part in reducing the frequency with which these incidents happen. Sergeant Darcy Pahl with the Winnipeg Royal Canadian Mounted Police has also expressed that the RCMP there are strongly in favour of the implementation of the amber-red advance warning lights, as they provide drivers with a better warning that the school bus will soon be stopping, giving them more time to safely come to a stop and resulting in fewer collisions. My final contact was with a corporal from the RCMP stationed in Fort St. John, British Columbia, who, similarly to Corporal Croteau and Sergeant Pahl, was in favour of the implementation of the amber-red advance warning light system.

Professional support is not exclusive to the regions outside of Ontario. During the course of my research, I wanted to exhibit that support is intraprovincial as well. After contacting professionals in the law enforcement industry and experts on school bus safety, I received several letters of support for my project. Mark Andrews, a retired traffic and marine inspector who worked with the northeast region of the Ontario Provincial Police for over 32 years, wrote that he is completely in support of the implementation of amber-red advance warning lights.

Andrews wrote that many of the traffic incidents that he had witnessed throughout his career may have been prevented had the amber warning lights been installed on the school buses. He acknowledged that drivers are known to associate amber flashing lights with potential danger, making the installation for school buses ideal.

1120

Pierre Ranger, chair of the Let's Remember Adam: Stop for the School Bus Campaign, also wrote in support, stating that the use of amber-red advance warning lights would make it significantly easier for motorists to determine what they are supposed to do when approaching a school bus.

Retired Detective Staff Sergeant Jeff Dagg, the lead investigator of the collision that took Adam Ranger's life,

writes that he has witnessed first-hand the devastation that occurs when drivers do not stop for the school bus. Dagg wrote that one more child being injured or killed by a driver who fails to stop is one too many, and that even if the new lighting system could save even just one life, it would be worth the implementation.

I understand that making these changes could be costly to those covering the expenses, so I took it upon myself to include the cost of implementing the amber-red advance warning light system on Ontario's school buses. According to the safety and legislation consultant of the Ontario School Bus Association, Robert Monster, who we heard from earlier, all school buses manufactured after January 1, 2005, are already equipped with the eight-lamp system; however, they are operating with red-only warning lights. Because these buses are already equipped with the eight lamps, it simply becomes a matter of changing the lamp covers for the majority of school buses, which comes to approximately \$90 per school bus, which breaks down into \$50 in parts, taxes in, and \$40 for labour.

To conclude, after conducting research on the implementation of the amber-red advance warning light system and discovering the positive safety outcomes that it can provide, I strongly urge the members of our provincial Parliament to pass Bill 246, the Safer School Buses Act. Our province's transportation minister, Mr. Jeff Yurek, has been quoted during a CityNews interview in 2019 stating that the safety of our most precious resource, our children, is our government's number one priority. I agree with Mr. Yurek, and one of the most efficient ways to do this is with the implementation of the amber-red advance warning light system on all of our province's school buses.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll now move on to the questions. We'll start with the opposition members for a round of 7.5 minutes. I recognize MPP Yarde.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: First of all, I want to thank all the participants for joining us today.

My first question is for Roy, who is from Peel region, which is of course where I am, in Brampton North. My question to you: You had mentioned that you'd written a couple letters to the Ministry of Transportation about your concerns. It's unfortunate you had to write a couple of letters. Can you explain to me what sort of response you got to the letters? When were those letters sent?

Mr. Roy Wierenga: Thank you for your question. Those letters were sent on behalf of the OASBO transportation committee, the Ontario Association of School Business Officials' transportation officials. There were two letters sent, and I have provided copies as part of my presentation. I'm just going to pull them up here. We're looking at May 2017 and December 2018. We did receive responses to both letters, and I have also provided that as part of my presentation as well. The ministry was certainly looking into this.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Okay. Obviously, the concern that we've had is that we're now in 2021, and we're trying to

find out what is taking so long for this bill to be brought forward. As we've all heard, Ontario is the last province to consider or to initiate this program. It is a little concerning that there are other things that would seem to be more important on the docket, but we are going to support this, obviously, because this is great for the protection of our younger generation.

Just out of curiosity, we heard earlier that bus drivers would have to press a button to engage the amber light. Is there a certain amount of time prior to doing that—like three seconds, five seconds, 10 seconds before; a bus driver does that, and then by the time it stops and the doors open, the red lights come on? Is there a safe period of time? Should they have the amber lights flashing for a kilometre? What would you consider as a safe period or distance to have those amber lights flashing?

Mr. Roy Wierenga: Well, I'd be pleased to answer that. I have worked 39 years in the school bus industry, and I've been involved in driver training. I can tell you that advance warning is critical and every stop is different. If you're approaching a stop in, say, a rural subdivision or a subdivision that's within a city, perhaps 100 metres out, you would activate your lights. However, if you're on a major highway with 70 or 80-kilometre-per-hour speeds, you would probably want to activate those lights 300 to 400 metres out, or even further.

Again, the responsibility of our school bus drivers is tremendous. I really think about those drivers every day, having to flip those red lights on to stop traffic. We need to do this for our bus drivers. They need a better tool to control and safely stop traffic. And it comes down to that bus driver and their judgment when they flip those lights on, and they could do that—it's up to them—either 100 metres, 300 metres, 400 metres out, but they make that decision. Currently, I can tell you today, they are delaying turning those red lights on if the traffic situations looks—you're just not going to throw these lights because it's going to cause panic or a truck or something could slam their brakes on.

So we really need to do this for our drivers. This is a tool that they can use. A bus driver must safely observe, control traffic to a safe stop before they let kids on or off the bus. They need this tool. It's long overdue, and they will be able to activate that warning much sooner than throwing on the red lights.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Any more questions, MPP Yarde?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: My next question is for Megan Odd. I appreciate all the research that you did. Obviously, it's very helpful for the committee and for the members here. I'm just curious. When you were doing your research on school buses, did you come across any other safety measures that you feel that this government probably should include? Perhaps, say, seat belts or limiting the amount of children on a bus, especially now during the pandemic? Any other safety features that you feel that we should be looking into?

Ms. Megan Odd: So, just recently, back in January, we had a ceremony where stop-arm cameras were implemented on our school buses in the Mattawa district—it's

just an area outside of North Bay. That was on behalf of the Let's Remember Adam campaign. Adam was from the Mattawa area, and that's where he was struck and killed. It's on the Trans-Canada Highway, so it's a very busy, high-speed intersection.

I think that implementing the stop-arm cameras province-wide would be very beneficial, because not only would we be able to, again, report the number of vehicles that are failing to stop for stopped school buses, but we would also be able to get the licence plate and properly charge those who have violated the law. This has already been done in Manitoba, and when I was speaking to RCMP member Darcy Pahl, he said that having those stop-arm cameras was extremely beneficial, as they were able to actually reprimand those who violated the stopping laws surrounding school buses in Manitoba.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Okay, thank you. I have no further questions.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. There is just about one minute left for the opposition members. Anyone else want to have a quick question? No? Okay, we can move on for another set of questions from the government members for seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all the presenters here today. It's great to see you all again. It's been very, very informative, and I'm really looking forward to some more of the questions that we're going to ask here.

During our recess, actually, I was talking a little bit with Vice-Chair Collard about border cities, whether that be sharing an international border or a provincial border, say Manitoba or Quebec, or any of the states on our southern border: Michigan, Ohio and New York state. Something we haven't really talked about much today is the fact that, really, Ontario is the only jurisdiction in North America that doesn't already use this system. We were just chatting back and forth about bus drivers just in the Ottawa area, for example, where you've got Gatineau and Hull right across the river, which are using the amber-red system already. When those drivers, say, are coming to work or maybe visiting family in Ontario, could you imagine the confusion when they just drive across the river and then all of a sudden they meet a school bus and there are no amber lights? It's just the red lights flashing and they're not really sure what's going on. The red lights are on; the bus is still moving.

1130

Maybe to Nancy or Robert, because you guys haven't really had a chance to chime in yet: What are your thoughts on how this will help clear up some of that misconception for drivers from areas that may not be from Ontario, when they're already using this literally everywhere else?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: I'll ask Robert to answer that question for us.

Mr. Robert Monster: I can speak to that. Obviously, consistency in rules of the road is extremely important. I'm involved with my work with the Ministry of Transportation in signage and so forth. Uniformity of the message

out to people, whether that's signage or the lights on a school bus, is extremely important, and the continuity between jurisdictions, what people are used to as they travel between jurisdictions and within the jurisdictions and so forth, is extremely important. It's something we want to emphasize, which is part of the reason why I've put forward the proposed amendment to also change the rear signage on the buses, because that also is another form of uniformity or continuity between the different jurisdictions. Other jurisdictions in Canada have already changed the wording to what is prescribed by the D250 standard. That would be another way to aid continuity and uniformity with what the other provinces are doing, by saying, "Stop when the red lights are flashing." It's a clearer language, and that is part of that commonality that I think we need to promote.

Mr. Mike Harris: Megan, maybe if we could just jump over to you quickly. In your research, and I know you've done some fairly extensive research on this, did you ever have any discussions with some of the operators or transportation agencies or police folks from any of these cities?

Ms. Megan Odd: I did. When conducting my research, I had the chance to work closely with Constable Shona Camirand with the North Bay OPP. She has been working on this initiative with local busing companies longer than I have even known about the amber-red lighting system. In order to have them implemented, she asked me to do research with her.

As expressed earlier, I've also had retired OPP officers express their support, writing letters in support for my research project, and I've also talked to family members, including Pierre Ranger, who lost his younger brother Adam. As mentioned previously as well, I've also had the chance to speak with RCMP officers across various provinces, and they've also all expressed their support for the amber-red system.

While I was doing my research, I did work in partnership with one of the local school busing companies in the North Bay area and I was able to get the perspective of the school bus operators, actually, regarding the amber-red system. I had actually visited the main office where the school buses are dispatched from in North Bay, and it was clear that all of those working there, whether they be the drivers of the school buses, those working dispatch or those working administrative jobs, were in favour of implementing the amber-red system. They had expressed that it couldn't come soon enough.

Mr. Mike Harris: That's great. Thank you. I believe MPP Hogarth was going to finish up this round.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Yes, MPP Hogarth, go ahead.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I just want to thank Nancy, Robert, Roy and Megan for sharing your stories here today. It's been a really interesting conversation all throughout this morning.

Megan, I just want to congratulate you. I understand this is your thesis. I wrote a thesis myself and the stress of all that, but to be able to influence public policy is such a

great inspiration to other young people, and we certainly want to encourage other young people to get involved with public policy and making a change, influencing policy change. So I congratulate you on that and on being able to take this step today. Congratulations.

I'm going to concentrate a little bit on you because you've done all this work most recently and talk about some of the data that you found. I wondered if you could elaborate on some of the data when comparing rates of illegal passes across all provinces. As MPP Harris mentioned earlier, we border Quebec, we border the States, we border Manitoba. What have you found and can you share with us some of the data that you found about illegal passes across the province? Do you feel this demonstrates the pressing need to transition Ontario to the amber-red system?

Once again, I want to thank the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for bringing this common-sense safety change forward.

Go ahead, Megan.

Ms. Megan Odd: Absolutely. Currently, I found that Ontario holds the second-highest incident rate per 1,000 students across all provinces included in my research. It was also found that Ontario exhibited an incident rate that is 1.55 times higher than the next province, which was Newfoundland.

Quebec was actually found to have the highest rates, which was alarming, considering that they've already implemented this amber-red lighting system, so I conducted further research into this. It was found that Quebec's inhabitants are known for slightly more aggressive driving habits. In 2013, a study was done that found Montreal to have 14.4 red-light infractions per 1,000 drivers, compared to Vancouver, another city in a province where the amber lights have already been implemented, which exhibited half of these rates, at 7.8. The calculated incident rate for Quebec could have been attributed to these driving habits; however, more research would need to be done in this specific field to confirm this.

But I do feel that these results demonstrate the pressing need for Ontario to transition to the amber-red advance warning light system simply for the fact that you can see it in the numbers that provinces who have already implemented this amber light system are experiencing lower incident rates per 1,000 students on school buses travelling to and from school.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much. That's actually all the time we have for this round of questions. We'll move on with the opposition members, for another round of 7.5 minutes. MPP Yarde, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: My question is to Roy, who mentioned earlier that there was some confusion about the current red light system for people. I was wondering if you could maybe just elaborate on what that confusion is and whether you think with the new amber-red light there will be additional confusion, or what sort of education do we have to put out there for the public.

Mr. Roy Wierenga: Yes, absolutely. There is clearly confusion out there. I don't know if you've ever met a

school bus yourself on the roadway, and you see the overhead lights come on. Every day when they face this, people slow down and stop, only to see the bus maybe drive right by them with the overhead lights on, and the person is saying, “Whoa, what’s going on?” It’s not clear.

It’s not fair that our bus drivers, in order to give warning to traffic that they’re about to stop, to slow down, to proceed with caution, have to use these red lights. It’s causing confusion and it happens every day. You could speak to any bus driver; I’m sure it happens every day on their run that when they put on those warning lights, which are red, there is confusion. They see confusion in cars that are approaching. By adopting an amber system, if instead of flashing red lights they could flash amber lights as they approach their bus stop, I think the average person is going to understand that the bus is still moving and that they’re getting some warning to be cautious and be prepared to stop. It’s a much more clear message to the public. That’s the confusion with the red light system, that the driver has to use that as a warning they’re about to stop, and I think the amber would clear that up.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Yarde, you can go ahead. You just muted yourself. Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I think this next question—either Nancy or Robert will be able to answer this. I know you had mentioned that we need some wording on the back of the bus saying, “Do not pass when red lights are flashing.” Obviously, we just heard Roy say that once some lights are flashing, sometimes there’s some confusion. Should there be additional signage on the bus so that people are aware that you have to stop? Because some people think you don’t have to stop until the bus comes to a complete stop. Some people think you have to stop as the lights are flashing. What additional safety precautions do you think are needed so that people actually just get it? Because people don’t seem to be getting it.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Robert will answer that.

Mr. Robert Monster: You’re correct: People don’t get it, which is why this is so important, and I’ve been pushing for this for years and years. As Roy stated, it’s the confusion about when to stop. I’ve been in the business for many years. You would ask many friends, “When do you have to stop for a school bus?” You would rarely get a correct answer, which is, “When the red lights are on and the bus is at a complete stop.” They would refer to lots of other things, but they wouldn’t get it right.

1140

Confusion causes problems. You want traffic rules to be very, very clear. When you actually have to stop is a very important matter, and the amber lights provide that. You have the warning, “I’m about to stop.” The advantage of this new system is that when those red lights come on, that means stop. I don’t have to guess, “Is the bus coming to a stop, yes or no?” or whatever. If the red lights are flashing, I have to stop.

To assist and to reinforce that is why I think the wording on the rear of the bus needs to be changed. It was always anticipated that that would go hand in hand with

this change to the amber-red system, to then also adopt the wording, “Stop when red lights flashing.” I don’t think there’s any additional wording or additional message that’s required. We just need the correct message, and the correct message is, “Stop when red lights are flashing.”

Another point of confusion with the word “signal” is that school buses, when they stop at a railway crossing, will put on their hazard lights to warn other motorists that they’re going to stop. It is not a requirement to stop for a school bus that has stopped at a railway crossing; it’s perfectly fine to pass a school bus. The school bus is stopping, they open their door to check for rail traffic and so forth. Drivers misunderstand “Stop when signals flashing.” They misinterpret that and they look at the amber hazard lights flashing and then they stop. Again, some people will do that, and most people will know that you don’t have to stop. When you have a situation where some people think they have to stop and other people don’t think you have to stop, that causes collisions, which it has at railway crossings where you get rear-end collisions of people stopping and other people not stopping.

Any way to clear that up is extremely beneficial, and the changing of the wording reinforces the transition to the amber-red system.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you, Robert. I’m not sure if Nancy wanted to add to that.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: No, he’s captured everything.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Okay. I know, both Nancy and Robert, you also mentioned—there is a date in mind that the government has of September 1, 2022. I know you mentioned that August 1, 2022, is beneficial. Can you explain why you think that additional month is important?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Robert can answer that, but it has to do with the start of school. Go ahead, Robert.

Mr. Robert Monster: Well, it has to do with the start of school as well as—basically, the transition has to happen over the summer. It’s obvious you want to finish one school year with the old system and start the new school year with the new system, and you have an entire summer to do that transition.

If you make it law—buses continue to be used over the summer for other purposes, so there are buses operating; not a lot. The problem is if you pick something at the beginning of the summer, July 1 or something like that, then obviously 20,000 buses are not going to be converted from the last day of school until July 1. It’s just totally impossible. So if you pick a July 1 date, it would then necessitate some creative enforcement: “Although it says July 1, we won’t charge you unless, later on, when it’s a more practical date, you get into issues like that,” which isn’t really appropriate and it’s not beneficial. If you pick September 1, then any buses that would continue to operate during the summer would have to operate under the old system and cannot be converted until September 1. The date of August 1, in the middle of the summer, gives you the most amount of flexibility and allows you to continue with the old system. For the few buses that you need, you continue with the old system until that date, and then on August 1, if you have—

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize, Mr. Monster. I have to interrupt you. Again, we're at the end of this round of time for the questioning. We'll move on with the last round of questions from government members. I recognize MPP Park. Go ahead.

Ms. Lindsey Park: My question is to Nancy. Nancy, we've spoken on the phone before, but it's wonderful to see you virtually. I just want to get your sense overall—it's about 130 school bus operators who are members of your organization, so I just want to get a sense of what you heard from them on the need to move to a system like this.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: It's been nothing but positive from the members, small, medium- and large-sized operators across the province. We've been wanting this for quite some time. We were pleased when the opportunity presented itself through Mike Harris and his leadership in making sure that we could move this forward as quickly as we could and in the best time frame possible for everyone involved.

It is being very well received, and certainly when I passed some of the information along to our members through newsletters and our webinars, it's been nothing but "thank goodness we're moving towards this." It's going to be really good news because anything that you can do to make it safer for the drivers and the students and anyone around the bus is good news, and this will indeed make it much more clear. It's similar to a traffic light: When it goes amber, you know you're supposed to slow down, and then when it's red, that's when you stop. So this is going to be very good news, and I haven't heard negative about it.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Excellent. I always find it's helpful, especially during the committee process—and we have a bit of time to do this—to hear stories from the front lines. We've heard a lot about close calls, where things have gone wrong, and some of the situations that perhaps this legislation could help prevent. So I wanted to see, Nancy, if you had any stories that came to mind from your front-line operators and drivers.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: I think our research student has outlined some really great stories, but I can tell you anecdotally that there isn't a day that goes by in Ontario where we don't hear about someone passing a school bus inappropriately when the red lights are flashing and when the bus is stopped. It's scary. School bus drivers call us up all the time to tell us about it: "It happened again. It happened again."

I have even witnessed it myself in my own community. I have seen two to three cars passing one school at one time, and it's scary every time it happens, because we know that students are at risk because they are getting off the school bus at that time. These are young students, JK all the way to 12, and those little ones are particularly susceptible to being hit.

We're thrilled that this is going to move forward in a timely manner, and I know that every single bus driver—all 18,000 of them in Ontario are going to be pleased with this.

Ms. Lindsey Park: My final question, Nancy, and then I'll pass it over to any of my colleagues who have

questions: You mentioned the words on the back of the school bus and how that can be misleading sometimes, so maybe if you can just elaborate on that. I'll be honest, I hadn't thought about that before you shared that insight with us.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Sure. I'm going to ask my colleague Robert Monster to testify to that because he has a lot of information about it.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): You can go ahead, Mr. Monster.

Mr. Robert Monster: Yes. Thank you. I did allude to that in a previous answer and now I'll just elaborate on that a little bit more, the confusion about the wording. The word "signals" can refer to either the amber or the red lights on converted buses. The amber lights are intended to give the message that the bus is preparing to stop and are activated while the bus is still moving. It is not the intent for motorists to stop when the amber lights are flashing.

The second problem with the word "signals" is what I talked about with regard to railway crossings. A bus driver must stop and check for traffic at a railway crossing. They activate the bus amber hazard-signal lights when this is going on, and other traffic is not required to stop, but they don't know that. They're looking at the signage on the rear of the bus, which is confusing. The only time the motorist must stop for the bus is when the red lights are flashing. Motorists that stop suddenly when they are not required to cause confusion.

So it's the confusion around the word "signals," which can refer to the amber light, the red lights or the hazard lights on the bus. You want to make it very clear that the requirement to stop relates only to the flashing red lights, and that's why the change of wording on the rear is important.

Perhaps further to that is the idea that if we do a complete conversion of the fleet—not just the post-2005 buses but the pre-2005 buses, which is one of our proposals—that would also standardize the rules of the road: The buses that you would see on the road would be all the same, and the rules would all be the same. You would no longer have buses with all-red lights.

Part of the confusion, again, is trying to eliminate having a bus with amber-red lights and then other buses with red lights only. If we could eliminate that and just move on to a complete conversion of all the buses, that would eliminate another major point of confusion, because now you're going to have some buses one way and other buses another way.

The Ministry of Transportation will have to do some marketing on this, and I think the clear message has to get out there: Red means stop. As long as we have buses on the road that still have only the all-red-light system, you can't say that; you can't market that absolute rule. When we can get to simple absolute rules—red means stop—that's when you're going to improve safety.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Any more questions for the members, with less than a minute? I'll recognize MPP Miller.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to all the presenters for your excellent presentations. I just had a question for Megan. Megan, the one number you said that really jumped out at me was the 30,000. It kind of demonstrated the need for this legislation. Can you talk a bit about what that 30,000 was, please?

Ms. Megan Odd: Absolutely. The 30,000 number is actually the frequency with which drivers illegally pass a stopped school bus every single day in Ontario. For my research, I had actually calculated the number of times that a driver illegally passed a stopped school bus, as an incident rate per 1,000 students, in each province. In Ontario, the number came to 36.14 incidences per 1,000 students. It was the second-highest incident rate across all the provinces that I included in my study and added up to the number of students within the province. It calculated to approximately 30,000 incidents a day. As I said, that's 30,000 times every day that a student's life is being put at risk or the possibility for a serious injury to occur.

Mr. Norman Miller: That's a much higher number than I would have expected, and it really demonstrates why this change is required. So thank you for that. I'll pass it on to my colleagues.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Actually, we've concluded the time that we had for this question, and that actually also concludes this session for this morning. I want to thank all the presenters for your very informative presentations. Thank you for taking the time to be with us this morning. I'm going to wish you a good rest of your day and, actually, a good weekend as well; it's Friday.

For the committee members, we're done with this morning, so we're going to stand in recess until 1 p.m. for the last presenter.

The committee recessed from 1153 to 1300.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Good afternoon. We're going to resume the process and hear our last presenter for the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and the review of Bill 246, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act.

Before we move on to the presenter, I notice that we do have two new members who have joined us. I would ask that you identify yourselves and confirm that you are, in fact, in Ontario. I'll start with MPP Tangri.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Good afternoon, everyone. I am MPP Tangri and I'm in Mississauga, Ontario.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Pang?

Mr. Billy Pang: I am MPP Billy Pang. I am in my riding of Markham–Unionville.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

MR. TONY GIVERIN

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We will move on with the last presenter of the day, Mr. Tony Giverin—let me know if I pronounced that correctly. You will have seven minutes for your presentation. I would ask that you state your name for the record, for Hansard, and then you may begin.

Mr. Tony Giverin: Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon to everybody. My name is Tony Giverin. Let me begin by sharing my support for Bill 246, the Safer School Buses Act, and acknowledging the work of MPP Mike Harris, who brought this private member's bill forward.

In 2016, I retired from the Ontario Legislature after 30 years of service, specifically as a staff member of the broadcast and recording department. Not one to take life lying down, and being a car guy who embraces all things transportation, I found myself soon after being interviewed for a school bus driver position. Clearly, this was out of my wheelhouse, but it appeared to be a good fit given my interest in driving. After three weeks of driver training, licensing, first aid accreditation, both a criminal background check and a vulnerable sector check, I became a full-time school bus driver, driving a full-size, 72-passenger bus in York region. I retired in June of last year, with no regret, and with a huge respect for the bus industry.

Clearly, I was on the outside looking in and entering a world that I knew very little about. I soon recognized the weaknesses, the strengths and the challenges of the school bus industry. One curious observation was the implementation of the two-pair red master lights, as they are known in the industry. When making mention of this to the training department, I was told that Ontario is the only jurisdiction in North America that doesn't adopt the amber-red combination. My disbelief resulted in some quick research confirming that Ontario is indeed unique in its dual-red-lamp configuration.

As a driver, it is my job to read the traffic flow, anticipate the arrival of a student stop, and determine when to activate those overhead lamps. For those who don't know, a simple push of a switch activates the sequence of events. It begins by a pair of red master lights flashing above. When the bus comes to a complete stop and the door is open, the currently flashing lamps turn off and immediately a second pair of red lamps now start flashing. The stop sign with the flashing lights is deployed and the safety arm located at the front of the bus reaches out, all of this without any warning to drivers in the vicinity.

While red-light runners, as they are known, were a daily occurrence, it was obvious to me that some kind of warning needs to be shown, and that warning is amber-coloured lamps. When drivers are approaching from behind, and those approaching from the front, see a moving bus with red lights flashing, there is no indication of what's going to happen next. When the bus finally does come to a stop and the doors open, it's that sudden, seamless change that catches drivers by surprise, usually resulting in drivers braking hard as to not pass the bus or, as quite often happens, they just simply continue driving, putting students at risk.

By simply implementing amber lamps as an early warning indicator, it is my belief that red-light runners will decrease in numbers, drivers will be better prepared when following or approaching a school bus, and student safety as a whole will be improved immediately.

Finally, I'll leave you with this analogy: The green-amber-red configuration is found on traffic lights around

the world. Amber is provided to simply warn of what is about to occur next: a red light. A red light—this is understood universally—is stop. My understanding is that this bill is getting all-party support, and by working together, you can implement this change while at the same time making school buses safer on the road.

Once again, I support Bill 246, and I'd invite any questions the committee may have regarding my own experience as a driver or that of the school bus industry. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you very much, Mr. Giverin, for your presentation. We'll give the floor to the members of the opposition for any questions they may have. MPP Morrison, go ahead.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Hi, yes. Thank you so much for your presentation. As you've said, we're happy to contribute our support to this bill. It does, in fact, have all-party support. It's been a great day in committee as we've heard from folks who have brought the different perspectives on why this is such a needed change. I guess I just wanted to start by thanking you for your service in your community as a driver. I mentioned earlier in the morning that my mom was actually a school bus driver for a few years when I was a little girl, and she was quite fond of that work and quite loved it.

I don't know that I have a ton of technical questions about the bill. I think we're pretty much all in agreement that this is a good, common-sense change that's long overdue, and it does, in fact, have all-party support. I guess my only main question to you would be, as a driver, are there any other safety considerations or changes that you've experienced in your time as a driver that are other future considerations to improve school bus safety that our Legislature should and could be looking at, beyond the scope of the bill that's before us today?

Mr. Tony Giverin: Absolutely. This is no surprise to you; I think you know this already: The seat belt conversation has been ongoing for decades. And the third concern I had as a driver that may be addressed some day as legislation is the need to stop at controlled railway crossings. That's a whole other conversation. We could spend all afternoon talking about that. But these were things that I discovered as a driver that just didn't seem to be on. I'm not a traffic expert. I'm not a transportation expert. But as a driver, I saw things that I thought needed to change.

I'll just leave you with this: When I have these conversations with my fellow colleagues, my fellow drivers, the standard response was the same. So, yes, there's a lot we could look at, but today, we're talking about the amber lamps, and that's a good place to start.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Excellent. Well, thank you so much. I don't have any other questions. I'll return it to my colleague MPP Yarde, if he has any.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Any more questions from the opposition members? MPP Yarde, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank Tony Giverin for your advocacy, and thank you for coming to join us here

to speak to this bill. We just heard—I'm just going to get the name of this lady who was on earlier, one of the researchers. Her name is Megan Odd. She said that, on a daily basis, 30,000 people—30,000 in Ontario—will pass a red-lighted school bus. When I heard that number—it's an absurd number. I'm sure that you, in your years as a driver, probably experienced that as well. I'm just curious, and we haven't really talked about this, if you think the fines that we currently have should be increased.

Mr. Tony Giverin: The fines should be increased, and as pilots are showing right now, cameras mounted on the stop sign that reaches out at the side of the bus would be a huge deterrent. There would have to be some kind of campaign to educate the public that this, indeed, is happening: "By the way, guys, if you decide to blow by a school bus, you can expect to pay this fine. And, oh, by the way, we have you on video."

I remember reading a headline about a month ago. I may be wrong, but I believe there's a pilot program in Ottawa right now where cameras have been installed on the stop signs, and the statistics are showing an unbelievable number of drivers blowing by. So, yes, increased fines and the installation of cameras that will hold up in court.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Any more questions from the members of the opposition? MPP Yarde, go ahead.

1310

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Mr. Giverin, I'm just curious: We did speak to a couple of other people earlier today saying that there is currently confusion with the lighting system we have, with just the red lights and not the amber-red light, which is currently across the rest of the country. How can you add to this conversation in terms of what you think the confusion is for drivers when they see the red lights?

Mr. Tony Giverin: I think the confusion is very simple. Drivers see red lights flashing, and unless you're paying close attention, the second pair of lights that come on, that are also red, are right next to the initial light, so nothing appears to have changed. That's why I made the comment in my presentation that it's a seamless transition. If you see yellow, you see yellow. If you see red, hopefully the driving public has been educated to know, "Hey, you've got to stop. It's a red light." It's that confusion. You're going from red to red. It makes no sense at all. We need to go from amber to red, as every other jurisdiction in North America does.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Yarde, you can go again. There are two minutes left.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I'm not sure how much time I have left, but I just wanted to ask you whether anything additional should be added to the back of the bus—perhaps a sign saying that once the light turns red, you have to stop. I think currently there is some concern that the sign is confusing as well because it says that once the signal is flashing, you have to stop. If we get an amber light on there, an amber light is also a signal, so people might stop at the amber because they think they have to stop. Do you

think the wording on the back of the bus should be changed as well?

Mr. Tony Giverin: I'm trying to remember what exactly was written on the back of my bus. I think the only text was, "This bus stops at all railway crossings." I can't recall any other message behind my bus. I could be wrong. But sure, messaging is important. The public is going to have to be educated, and there's going to have to be some kind of campaign. The news media are going to do a great job, because they're going to be all over this, especially if it's combined with increased fines and cameras. I understand your point. Messaging is very, very important. That's pretty much all I can say regarding that.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I don't want to put you on the spot in terms of a dollar amount for fines, but obviously, when cellphones came out, the fine for cellphones and driving was set at a certain fine, and then it was increased again and it was increased again. Do you have any particular number that you think would be sufficient, perhaps, to dissuade drivers from passing a bus that's stopping?

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Excuse me. I'm sorry to interrupt. Unfortunately, we'll have to hear the answer at the next round. We're out of time for this round. We'll move to the government members for questions. I recognize MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Madam Chair, through you, Mr. Giverin, thank you very much for joining us today. It's great to hear the opinions of someone who actually spent time driving a school bus. I know the members here have all heard that already, but I am a volunteer firefighter with the county of Brant and have been for 13 years. What strikes me is, out there, you see so many things that stay with you forever: pictures that you can't get out of your head.

So I was wondering, if it's not too personal—with 30,000 blow-bys happening in the province of Ontario every single day, I'm sure that this is something that you've witnessed too, and I pray that you never were witness to anything tragic happen. I was wondering if you could describe for the committee and for the record what it feels like when you're in that bus driver's seat and someone makes the decision or at the last minute decides to burn through your red signals and go right past you while you're waiting for a child to get onto the bus.

Mr. Tony Giverin: The first response is anger. You're in disbelief, and you become angry. I can tell you that the bus drivers I worked with—we would lose our minds when we witnessed somebody blowing through our stop sign. And you can anticipate it. It was amazing. You're sitting in the driver's seat, you see a car approaching, and you kind of know this person's not going to stop.

What I would do is I would open the side window and I would blast my horn. My hand is on the horn and the horn would not lift off. I'm telling everybody in the vicinity, including the small little ones that are getting off the bus, that something is happening that's dangerous. I would stay on the horn and my left hand would reach out the window and I would simply point at the car. We're professional. There were no verbal words being thrown.

There were no gestures. There was simply a horn on and I would point to the car. That's what I did. And they would blow by and the driver would look up and there was just this look of disbelief, like, "What's up? What am I doing wrong?"

I'll end with this: On my route, you drove five days a week. On about three of those days, I would have red light runners. So to answer your question, it was anger, because every school bus driver out there truly does care about the safety of not only the older high school kids who are getting off, but the little ones. We have four-year-olds getting off our bus. You've really got to be paying attention. I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that very, very much, and I have to say that I appreciate your service to the people of Ontario, not only through your regular working career but then when your retired, you picked it right back up again for our children.

I know my dad, on the farm, when he retired from full-time farming, he picked up a bus route too. It was actually for special-needs children to be able to go to their high school in Sarnia, which on a direct route was about a half an hour away, and he really, really appreciated it. I never had the opportunity to talk to him about this issue. He's been passed away for 18 years now.

But I know in front of our house also—in my other life, I am an optometrist and we lived above our practice on Main Street in St. George, Ontario. When we lived in that house and the bus would stop in front of the house to pick up our children, you're right, usually once a week our driver would be laying on the horn because the lights would be on and someone would be going through that.

I really appreciate that, but I'd like to give you just a minute to answer a question from my colleague MPP Yarde. What do you think is a suitable fine for someone who decides to blow by a school bus?

Mr. Tony Giverin: The first number that comes to mind is \$1,000. It's a lot of money. It's doable; it's affordable. My two cents: \$1,000.

Mr. Will Bouma: Okay. That's a nice round figure. It also puts me in mind of some of the things that we could do because we have cameras on buses now. You have red light cameras that I pass on my way to Queen's Park, and I can see at some point in the future that someone just gets a little bill in the mail based on their licence plate when they blow by a school bus, and that might be effective like that too. But regardless—how much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There's two and a half minutes left.

Mr. Will Bouma: Then I will give you a break, unless one of my colleagues wants to pick up, and we can go to the second round otherwise.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Other questions from the members of the government? No? Moving on to the opposition members, did you want to ask more questions? MPP Morrison, go ahead.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Yes. Again, I'm kind of out questions, to be honest, but if you had any other anecdotes or

stories that you wanted to share through your experience as a driver that really help us get into the record the need for this change, I'd be happy to give you my time to do that.

Mr. Tony Giverin: I appreciate that. I think bus drivers anywhere have many stories to tell. Some of them wouldn't be appropriate right now. Some of them would be a moot point. Sure, we have stories, but today we're talking about the amber lights; we're talking about safety. I can truly and honestly and sincerely say that drivers that are out there really do have the best intentions for the safety of little children. That's where we're at as drivers. Sure, there are anecdotes, and sure, there are stories. A lot of them are funny.

1320

I do remember that seat belts were very controversial. In the four years I was driving, I never had any close calls, but I remember literally slamming the brakes on a full-sized school bus with students on board because a dog had run out in front of the bus. I thought I'd hit the dog; the good news is, the dog turned out to be fine. But a little boy who was sitting about seven or eight rows back, in his chair, properly—I'm one of the strict drivers; my kids behave themselves—ended up right beside me, right by the door. He literally was thrown out of his chair and slid down the centre aisle. There I am, sitting in the driver's seat, and I look to the floor beside me, and here's this five- or six-year-old little boy with this shocked look on his face, because he had no idea what had just happened. It's those kinds of things, when you ask a question like that, that come to mind, but that's pretty much it.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Okay. Well, thank you for your presentation today. I think it was really helpful and insightful to hear first-hand from the perspective of a driver today, and I want to thank you for taking the time to come to our committee. I don't have any further questions—I don't know if my colleague does—but again, thank you so much for your time.

Mr. Tony Giverin: You're welcome.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Yarde, there's still some time left if you want to ask more questions.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Certainly. I don't really have any more questions. I just want to thank you for coming on today and your advocacy. Obviously, myself and my colleagues will be supporting this bill, because our children's future, our children's safety is number one.

Just out of curiosity in terms of your members that you have: Is it overwhelming support of this bill in terms of the changes that we are requesting?

Mr. Tony Giverin: I've kept in touch with some of the drivers since leaving last year—in fact, I'm having lunch with a few of them tomorrow—and I'll share this meeting with them and let them know what happened.

Yes, the drivers seem to be in support. I'll tell you, who's not in support are the mechanics and the technicians who are going to have to install all these amber lights, but my response to that is that it's three screws. You're literally just removing a red lens and replacing it with an

amber lens. That would take five minutes per lens. You're talking 20 minutes per bus.

And the cost is minimal; I think I read somewhere you're looking at about \$90 a bus, which sounds about right. You may get some pushback from the bus owners, because now you've just legislated a cost, an expense that they have to do by law, but the cost is minimal, and they can afford it. Let me just leave it at that: They can afford it. They can afford \$90 a bus to make this change.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you, Mr. Giverin.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll move on to the government for final questions or comments. I recognize MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Tony, for being here today and providing a very unique perspective, obviously, as a bus driver for many years. There are a couple of things—I think this is going to really end off pretty much all of our questions and comments today, so maybe just a couple of things to round up here.

Earlier today we had safety advocates and bus operator organizations here on the call, and they were all very supportive of this as well. A lot of them had already thought that this was going to come down the pipe at some point over the last few years and have already started making the necessary arrangements to change lenses. Some have even stockpiled all the necessary materials that they're going to need to go ahead and move forward with this change.

There are obviously a few things we might be looking at here as some amendments to the bill that we've heard today, and some stuff that we had thought about putting in at the beginning but just weren't sure. Obviously, going through the committee process, there are a few extra things that can come to light during the conversation, so it has been really good to hear a lot of that today.

One of the things I know we've talked about a little bit is: As a driver, what do you actually have to do when you're in the bus and you're pushing buttons to get lights on, and you're opening doors, which activate other lights? I know MPP Yarde had asked the question earlier, but since we have you here as a driver, I thought maybe it would be good to hear from your perspective as to, really, how easy it is to activate what would potentially become the amber-red dual-lamp system, just to kind of hear it from you first-hand.

Mr. Tony Giverin: Well, to talk specifically about the lamps, and as I mentioned in my presentation, it's the push of one button. That's all the driver does. Now, he's driving a vehicle; whether you're braking, you're accelerating, you're looking around, it's automatic transmission, so you're not really touching that. It's really no different than driving your car. I had a student ask one day, "Sir, is it hard to drive one of these?" and I went, "No, it's pretty much like a car, just 10 times bigger."

But to answer your question about the lamps, it's simply one button. It's called "master lights." It's usually on a panel to the left of the driver, at least on the newer, modern buses. You just press that button and everything else seamlessly follows, and all of that is triggered by

opening the door. So when the bus does finally come to a stop—and, by the way, you fully secure a bus when it comes to a stop. You're not just sitting there with your foot on the brake pedal; you actually apply the parking brake. When you press another button, because the doors are electric nowadays, the door opens. When that door is opening, the second set of lights comes on automatically, the stop sign swings out automatically, the safety arm at the front comes on automatically. So, as a driver, it's not a challenge. You've just got to be paying attention and you've got to use good judgment of when to press that button.

I'll just elaborate a little bit, briefly. What I mean by using judgment of when to apply that button: You're looking at traffic flows. I'm going down a suburban street, and I see five cars in a row approaching the bus. I'll start slowing down. I'm not putting my lights on right away. I'm not going to push that button, because I see this huge gap behind those five cars. You know what, I'm going to let those five cars go by. I'm going to judge my speed accordingly. By the time I reach the stop, they've passed on. Then, I'll turn on my lights. Why do I do that? Because we don't have amber lights to warn them.

So if that answers your question, I hope that's of some help.

Mr. Mike Harris: That's great and, like I said, hearing your perspective as someone who has driven a bus and obviously is very mindful of all the things that go on as a school bus driver. As part of my opening remarks, as our first, I guess you could say, panellist or witness here today, I was talking about my kids. My son takes the school bus every day. So I just wanted to give you a personal thank you for helping to get our kids to and from school safely.

With that, I think we're going to wrap it up, from the government perspective. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Very well. Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Giverin, and for the time you took to join us today to share your experience. This actually concludes our business for today.

I just want to give a couple of reminders. As a reminder, the deadline to send in a written submission will be 7 p.m. on Friday, March 26, 2021. That's today. The deadline for filing amendments to the bill will be 12 noon on Monday, March 29, 2021.

I want to thank all the committee members, as well, for being here and asking very good questions. I want to wish you a very nice weekend, everyone.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, March 31, 2021.

The committee adjourned at 1329.

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