

Coventry Public Schools

Kenneth R. Di Pietro, Superintendent of Schools
Michael Convery, Asst. Superintendent - Instruction
James Erinakes II, Asst. Superintendent - ULSS

1675 Flat River Road, Coventry, RI 02816
Tel. 401-822-9400 Fax: 401-822-9406
TTY: 1-800-745-5555

Anthony Ferrucci, Business & Finance Director
Mary Lou Buonaccorsi, Human Resources
Brian Steverman, Physical Plant Director



February 13, 2008

Ms. Becky Wright
RI Department of Education
Office of Progressive Support & Intervention
255 Westminster Street
Providence, 02903 RI



Dear Ms. Wright;

I am writing on behalf of the Coventry School Committee to request an Alternative Variance to bus monitors for Coventry Public Schools. Coventry has researched the possibility of a technological alternative for safe student transportation on school busses. A company is prepared to place two (2) surveillance cameras monitoring the undercarriage of our busses. By so doing, the concern related to the inspection under the bus by a bus monitor to ensure that no student had slipped under the bus can be ensured. We believe that by installing this technology that Coventry can serve as a model for safe transportation that is an alternative to costly bus monitors.

By design of the position, bus monitors assist students with embarking onto and disembarking from the school bus. They then inspect the undercarriage of the bus to ensure that no student would be injured from having fallen under the bus. Monitors are not expected to contribute to discipline on the bus. On occasion, bus monitors may be absent without replacement. Although bus monitor regulations allow for absence on a limited scale, by using technology, the service of visually inspecting the undercarriage of the bus for safety would have no interruption. We believe that technological surveillance can be a more cost effective and a more reliable service.

These difficult financial times have prompted more discussion, research and consideration of alternatives. If the variance is provided to Coventry Public Schools, the school system is prepared to install, supervise and report on the effectiveness of the alternative. Inclusion of the surveillance cameras would not prohibit Coventry Schools from also retaining bus monitor services on selected busses determined by the student needs and situations where students must cross the street to embark or after disembarking.

I believe that Coventry investigated this issue with respect and concern for the safety of our students and that our request for a variance to the use of bus monitors is within the parameters established by legislation and regulation. We look forward to approval from the Rhode Island Department of Education and are prepared to report on the effectiveness of the system as well as invite other districts to review the technological alternative.

I can be reached by phone or attend a meeting to discuss this matter if necessary.

Sincerely,


Kenneth R. Di Pietro
Superintendent

C: Coventry School Committee

"Working Together To Improve Our Schools"

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REQUEST FOR SCHOOL BUS MONITOR VARIANCE
SCHOOL YEAR 2008-2009

SCHOOL DISTRICT: Coventry

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE VARIANCE(S) BELOW THAT YOU WILL NEED TO USE
IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT DURING THE 2008-2009 YEAR.

CONTINUING VARIANCES: Those variances, which provide for permanent or ongoing
replacement of the monitor with an alternative plan.

- Zone Monitor, Plus Public Address System
- Door-to-Door Transportation - K-5
- Door-to-Door Transportation - K only

ALTERNATIVE VARIANCE: School district proposal for Commissioner consideration and approval
before implementation.

Alternative Proposal Attached

NO VARIANCE:

No Variance Request

Kenneth R. DiPietro

SUPERINTENDENT'S SIGNATURE

2/13/08

DATE

Please Return To:
Becky Wright
Rhode Island Department of Education
Office of Progressive Support and
Intervention
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Burrillville	Coventry	Barrington	Charlestown	Little Compton
Cumberland	East Greenwich	Bristol	Exeter	Middletown
North	Foster	Central Falls	Hopkinton	Newport
Smithfield	Glocester	Cranston	Jamestown	Portsmouth
Woonsocket	Scituate	East Providence	Narragansett	Tiverton
	Warwick	Johnston	New Shoreham	
	West Warwick	Lincoln	North	
		North	Kingstown	
		Providence	Richmond	
		Pawtucket	South	
		Providence	Kingstown	
		Smithfield	West Greenwich	
		Warren	Westerly	

Question relating to special education transportation should be directed to the local director of special education or to the Rhode Island Department of education.

Q- When are school bus monitors required?

A. A bus monitor is required on buses carrying children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Under some narrow circumstances, when equivalent safety has been ensured, the Rhode Island Department of Education may grant a variance from the bus monitor requirement. ✓

Q. Are school bus routes and bus stops checked for safety?

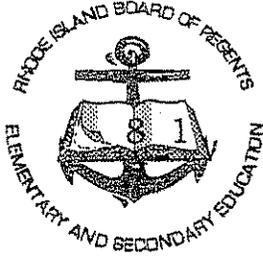
A. All school bus routes and stops must be checked and approved by the local police chief of each city and town for safety hazards within ninety days before the start of the school year. Disputes about the safety of school bus routes and bus stops may be appealed to the Commissioner of Education. (R.I.G.L.31-20-10.3)

Q. Does Rhode Island law require door-to-door transportation for students who attend kindergarten and elementary school?

A. While Rhode Island law requires all school bus routes and stops to be approved for safety it does not, as a rule, require door-to-door transportation for students who attend kindergarten and elementary school. However, door-to-door transportation may be required for certain special education students or as a condition to obtaining a variance to the bus monitor law. Also, as a matter of local policy, some school committees may on their own initiative provide door to door transportation for younger students.

Q. What is the minimum number of schools days required for a calendar year?

A. Typically 180 days, however new high school regulations allow you school districts to propose alternative scheduling approaches. A need to accommodate senior examination schedules may also justify some variations to the school calendar.



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

March 19, 2008

Mr. John DiTomasso
Director, Division of Motor Vehicles
100 Main Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

Reference: Coventry School Committee Variance Request – School Bus Monitor

Dear Mr. DiTomasso:

The Coventry school committee, through its superintendent, has requested that I grant a variance to Rhode Island's school bus monitor law (R.I.G.L.16-21-1 (b)) so as to allow two surveillance cameras monitoring the undercarriage of bus to substitute for the presence of a school bus monitor on bus runs carrying students enrolled in kindergarten through fifth grade. A copy of this variance request is attached.

The granting of this variance would involve the installation of equipment on a school bus, and since it would involve new operational duties of for school bus drivers, I would not wish to act in this matter without receiving guidance from the Department of Motor Vehicles, and its Office for School Bus Safety, about the technical feasibility of granting such a variance, as well as the safety issues which might be associated with assigning additional duties to bus drivers.

The best source of information concerning the operational details of how this proposed surveillance camera system would operate would be the superintendent of schools of Coventry, Mr. Kenneth R. Di Pietro (tel. 822-9400).

Your advice on this important safety issue would be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

PM(FLA):scp

cc: Mr. Edward Parker, Motor Carriers & School Bus Safety
Mr. Kenneth R. Di Pietro, Superintendent, Coventry Public Schools
Ms. Rebecca Wright

Telephone (401)222-4600 Fax (401)222-6178 TTY 800-745-5555 Voice 800-745-6575

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

DIVISION OF MOTOR VEHICLES

100 Main Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

BOARD OF REGENTS FOR
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

April 30, 2008

MAY 8 2008

OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONER

Peter McWalters, Commissioner
Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence Rhode Island 02903-3400

Dear Commissioner McWalters:

This letter is in response to your correspondence requesting our input into a request made by the Town of Coventry to seek a school bus monitor variance from the Department of Education. In your correspondence you state that Coventry is proposing to have surveillance cameras installed on the undercarriage of school buses as a substitute to the use of monitors.

Upon my request, Edward Parker of our Motor Carrier and School Bus Office discussed this matter with Kenneth DiPietro, Superintendent of the Coventry School Department. Mr. Parker told me that Mr. DiPietro informed him the camera surveillance is an idea he had on his own and is not aware of any companies that sell such a camera system that monitors danger zones of school buses.

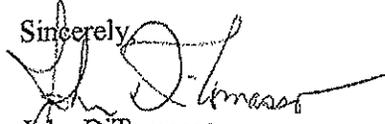
There are devices presently used in other states to assist the student in the danger zone. One such device is the school bus crossing arm. The arm extends from the front bumper of the bus creating a barrier that prevents students from walking close to the front of the bus, which is considered part of the danger zone.

As for the school bus driver, it would be difficult to answer your question pertaining to the safety issues associated with assigning additional duties to the drivers.

Given the financial plight that our municipal school districts are currently facing, it may be a good time to create a working group to study the school bus monitor issue. Such a group could look into various alternatives to school bus monitors that can result in cost savings measures, while at the same time provide a safe environment for school children walking in the danger zone directly around the school bus. I would be willing to work with your staff in this endeavor.

Please contact me at 462-5703 if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



John DiTomasso
Assistant Administrator

cc Gary Sasse
Charles Hollis
Jacqueline Kelly
Marcy Coleman
Edward Parker



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

July 15, 2008

Mr. Kenneth R. DiPietro
Superintendent of Schools
Coventry Public Schools
1675 Flat River Road
Coventry, RI 02816

Mr. John DiTomaso
DMV Assistant Administrator
Division of Motor Vehicles
100 Main Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

Dear Sirs,

As you know, Rhode Island law requires the use of school bus monitors on bus runs transporting students enrolled in kindergarten through fifth grade:

R.I.G.L. 16-21-1 Transportation of public and private school pupils. *** (b) For transportation provided to children enrolled in grades kindergarten through five (5), *school bus monitors*, other than the school bus driver, shall be required on all school bound and home bound routes. *Variances to the requirement for a school bus monitor may be granted by the commissioner of elementary and secondary education if he or she finds that an alternative plan provides substantially equivalent safety for children.* For the purposes of this section a "school bus monitor" means any person sixteen (16) years of age or older.

Superintendent DiPietro of Coventry has requested the Commissioner of Education to consider whether technology has progressed to the point where a "smart" video camera system, or something similar, might provide a level of safety at least equivalent to the level of safety provided by school bus monitors, and therefore qualify as an allowable variance.

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Mr. Kenneth R. DiPietro

Mr. John DiTomasso

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A very preliminary review of this question will show that video surveillance systems, and methods of protecting their associated video cameras from rain, dust, mud debris and exhaust fumes have become much more sophisticated in the last few years, but that, as of yet, such systems are not being used to monitor the front and back wheels of school buses. Still it seems obvious that the use of such video monitoring systems should be explored.

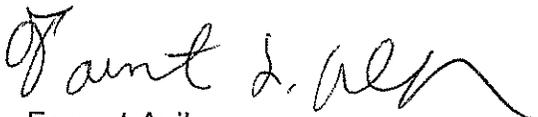
To this end, Deputy Commissioner Abbott of the Rhode Island Department of Education has requested that I form a preliminary small study committee to examine this issue with Superintendent DiPietro and with the Rhode Island Department of Motor Vehicles. It is my understanding that Mr. John DiTomasso of the DMV may be able to participate in this committee.

Of course, the potential implementation of any video monitoring system must also entail the consideration of human factors in the perception and the use of the information displayed on a video monitor. It must be recalled here that in operating a school bus a school bus driver must attend to traffic conditions, images in safety mirrors, and passenger actions. Consideration must be given to what additional burden, if any, might be placed on driver by requiring a driver to additionally view a video monitor before moving the bus. Numerous other issues will also present themselves, including the manner in which research, development, and possible production of a workable video surveillance system may be contracted for.

This letter should, of course, not be taken to indicate that the Commissioner is presently considering the granting of a technology variance to the school bus monitor law. Even if it is determined that a technological approach to this safety issue is possible, it might be more appropriate to proceed by way of legislation or by regulations promulgated in accordance with the Rhode Island Administrative Procedures Act.

Please let me know if you can participate in this committee. We will then agree on a time and place for our first meeting.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Forrest Avila", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Forrest Avila

Legal Counsel / Hearing Officer