

07/10/2012

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To the Honorable Members of the Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into the Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework.

My name is Jennifer Pescud and I have been driving School Buses in the Perth Metropolitan area for the past seven years. The Children I have been transporting have been Special Needs Children going to Education Support Schools, mainly to Durham Road School in Bayswater. I have concerns for the condition of School Buses and some of School Bus Services rules and how they are administered. I hope my submission will lead to a major improvement of the Safety, Health and Fairness to Students and Staff on School Bus Services.

School Bus Safety and Roadworthiness

When I started driving School Buses School Bus Service had their own inspectors inspecting School Buses for Roadworthiness above the annual Department of Transport Inspections. Since this has ceased, I believe the standard of School bus safety has been reduced. I know a shortage of qualified Mechanics is a contributing factor and believe Contractors need to pay better rates to source qualified Mechanics. Another thing that has concerned me with a major contractor I was working for is that Buses were sent from Northern and Eastern Metropolitan Depots to a DOT Inspection Business in Mandurah. This was carried out at considerable expense given wages and running costs to do this. **I wonder why these buses weren't inspected locally.**

The head Mechanic at the depot become so overwhelmed with Bus faults at my Depot he wrote on a blackboard that he had 78 faults lodged that needed fixing. I once waited five weeks to get new steer tyres on my bus. They had worn down past the wear bar indicators. The Mechanic told me he wouldn't send me out with unsafe tyres and I replied, but they were unroadworthy. A practice I have had serious concerns about steer tyre inflation. I have seen on two occasions where steer tyres with slow have been pumped up of a morning and the buses sent out to do there morning run. The danger here is that the tyres could deflate to the point where they overheat and blowout, which could potentially cause an accident.

Driver Medical Assessments

Recently there have been two accidents involving School Buses that have involved fatalities. It has been reported that it is likely that the drivers had Medical Episodes. I believe Bus driver medical assessments should be performed by independent Doctors not the Driver's Family Doctor. This would help family Doctors not feeling pressured into passing Drivers that are at the margins of not being safe to Transport People.

Availability and Age of Bus Drivers

The Nature of School Bus Driving being morning and afternoon runs being a total of about 4 to 6 hours a day. Given the low pay rates for the responsibility Bus drivers have, a top up from Centrelink is required to provide a decent living wage. I suspect that the average age of bus drivers is in the mid sixties and these drivers are working for various reasons including the lack of Superannuation. I believe as the years go by more people will have good Superannuation and be less likely to want to drive School buses. There is a requirement for School Bus Contractors with Clause 9.12 of the Evergreen Contracts a higher pass through of wages to Drivers, Bus Aides and Bus Wardens. Currently I believe this maybe about \$4.00 to \$5.00 per hour. I believe these rates need to be applied to all School Bus Contracts no matter how long they are, after all everyone is doing the same sort of work so should be paid the same.

Bus Driving Tests

I believe School Bus Drivers need to have regular testing to ensure they can still drive safely. The major contractor I worked for had irregular testing. I was tested twice in five years. I bring this up as an Aide told me she was allocated another driver because her regular driver was off work. This Aide made a complaint to her Manager that the driver was speeding, and she was concerned for the safety of the children and herself. The Manager told her " He is a licensed bus driver and we are short of drivers" This is a concerning attitude given we are transporting People's most precious possessions their Children.

Loose items in Bus Cabins

Recently School Bus Services ruled that a walker used by one of our students wasn't allowed to be carried on the school bus. This walker was secure as the frame was secured by being in between the back seats and back door. There was no way it could become dislodged. This was unfair on the family as his mother had to bring and take home the walker. No point on going on the School bus something he loves. This brings into question of whether Schoolbags, Second bite bags (which often have tinned food in them) which are sent home to Families in need and Bottles of Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy Feed should be placed in a secure place. Mitsubishi Fuso Rosa school buses have nowhere to safely put these in a secure place in case of emergency. They could all become dangerous projectiles. It has been suggested that the large back seat in Rosa's be removed and a cage be put in place to securely store these items.

Transporting Sick Children

Prior to Covid 19 I got into trouble for refusing to allow a girl, who had dark green snot flowing from her nose, on my bus. At the time I took the matter up with Senior Management of my employer (as I was given a written warning by my manager) and Senior Management at School Bus Services. I believe I was in my rights to refuse transport to this student because she could pass on her cold to other students (who being special needs are often immunity compromised) my Aide and myself. I believe buses are like incubators of sickness. I suggested that we be able to use infrared thermometers to check children's temperatures if we suspected they were sick before they got on the bus. This request was refused as it would be an impingement of student's rights and it would be too hard to implement.

Come along Covid 19 lots of places like Doctor's surgeries, Hospital, Chemists, Childcare centres, etc used infrared thermometers on us to determine if we could come in. Still school bus drivers and Aides aren't allowed to do the same. In the interests of Health and Safety of Staff and Students on School buses I respectfully request that Staff on School buses be allowed to check student's temperature before they get on the bus.

In closing my submission and as my School Bus driving days are coming to an end I do hope my suggestions are taken on board and a safer, fairly remunerated School Bus Services system in Western Australia comes out of this Inquiry. Cheaper is not always best.

Kind Regards

Jennifer Pescud

