December 1, 2017

Minister Mitzie Hunter  
Ministry of Education  
14th Floor, Mowat Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Minister Kevin Flynn  
Ministry of Labour  
400 University Avenue,  
14th Floor  
Toronto ON M7A 1T7

Dear Minister Hunter and Minister Flynn,

**RE: Enhancing Retention and Wages for Ontario School Bus Drivers**

It has recently come to our attention that the Ontario School Bus Association (OSBA) and the Independent School Bus Operators Association (ISBOA) have been engaging in meetings with officials from the Ministry of Education to discuss increasing funding for student transportation services in Ontario and the need to develop school bus driver retention strategies.

As Ontario’s largest school bus drivers’ union, representing just over 2,000 drivers across the province, we believe that Unifor is a key stakeholder in such conversations. Unifor has long vocalized our concerns regarding challenges facing school bus driver recruitment and retention, along with the need to address poor wages and working conditions that are exacerbating the problem of province-wide driver shortages.

We are aware that the OSBA and ISBOA have raised alarm bells that the increase to Ontario’s minimum wage to $15.00 will lead to the intensification of driver shortages, and that they are requesting increased government funding to deal with rising driver wages. While we fully support strong public funding of our school bus transportation system, we take issue with the assertion that increasing wages for the lowest paid in the Ontario will result in further driver shortages. Shortages faced by bus operators and school boards across Ontario have already been experienced well before any discussion on minimum wage hikes. Compared to other transit driver occupations, school bus drivers are among the lowest paid. They work part-time hours, receive little to no benefits, and often work unpaid time.

We believe that any increase in provincial funding for school bus transportation should go directly towards supporting driver wages and retention initiatives. We do not want to see a repeat of events of 2008, when the province introduced a school bus driver wage enhancement fund of $10 million dollars, yet the funds did not go to drivers as it was initially intended. To this day, the province is unable to account of the whereabouts of this $10 million dollars despite numerous inquiries.
The school bus industry faces significant challenges and it is our desire to ensure that conditions are improved for drivers, students, parents, and our communities. That is why Unifor continues to call for the creation of a School Bus Industry Council, comprised of provincial government officials, school bus operators, consortia, labour unions, and other key stakeholders, to collectively discuss issues facing the industry and development effective solutions.

Finally, we know that the Ministry of Education announced in April of this year that they would be engaging in an overall review of the student transportation funding formula. We would greatly appreciate further details on this review, particularly around anticipated consultation timelines and process.

We would be happy to meet to discuss these issues further in person and have the opportunity to become engaged in these high-level discussions with other stakeholders in order to create a stronger and more stable student transportation industry. We thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

JERRY DIAS
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

c: Chris MacDonald, Len Poirier, Debbie Montgomery, Kathleen O’Keefe

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