

February 1, 2023

The Honorable Jay Xiong
Chairman, Workforce Development Finance and Policy
Minnesota House of Representatives

Re: House File 20

Dear Representative Xiong:

First Student writes to offer support for House File 20, a legislative proposal that would provide unemployment benefits to our school bus drivers during the summer months when work is unavailable or scarce at best. Retaining our experienced bus drivers is among our highest priorities and this legislation is vital to ensure that we continue to employ the most professional and highest quality school bus drivers in Minnesota.

As the leading school transportation solutions provider in North America, we recognize that with every stop, we have the ability to positively impact each student's day, so they arrive at school ready to learn and be inspired. Our bus drivers play an essential part in providing this service. They are experienced professionals and members of your local community who are dedicated to providing your school districts, students and their families with the highest level of service. As familiar, trusted faces in the community, they understand their important role to positively impact each student's day.

The demand for commercial drivers is severe throughout the country, and our Minnesota locations are no exception. As the largest employer of school bus drivers in North America, the recruitment and retention of qualified bus drivers is a serious and ongoing challenge. This bill will assist our retention efforts by providing our drivers with unemployment insurance during the summer months.

Most states in which we do business allow school bus drivers the opportunity to draw unemployment benefits during the summer months, providing these hard-working individuals with income security between school years. Absent this income, many of these individuals are forced to seek alternative employment over the summer months, and in many instances, do not return to First Student for the following school year.



First Student bus drivers are required to pass rigorous pre-employment screening including drug testing and criminal background checks. Further, our bus drivers complete hours of classroom and behind-the-wheel training prior to working for First Student. This screening and training continues throughout their employment.

Recruiting and developing professionally-trained school bus drivers doesn't happen without a significant investment by our company. Thousands of dollars are spent annually on these very important initiatives. But we believe it is what we must do to ensure parents that their children will get to and from school safely each and every day. But when these drivers don't return at the beginning of the school year because they've found other jobs, our investment is lost, and our customers lose an experienced driver.

Finally, as an employer, we are required to pay into the Minnesota unemployment fund while our employees are prohibited from receiving benefits. This is unfair and inequitable and puts us at a disadvantage to other employers in recruiting skilled employees in demand.

For reasons above, and to promote safe, professional school transportation in Minnesota, we respectfully ask that you support House File 20.

Sincerely,



Tom Secest
SVP, Labor Relations

