

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 1924

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 3, 1996

The Assembly Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 1924.

This bill provides that the Division of Motor Vehicles must determine as part of its periodic inspection of school buses, whether the grab handle on such buses is properly installed and meets all applicable safety standards. The term "grab handle" refers to a bar installed alongside the front door steps of a school bus which assists children in boarding or exiting the bus. If the division determines that the grab handle is defective, then it must order the bus to be removed from service until the handle is repaired and reinspected.

The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the transportation of children in school buses whose front-door grab handles are defectively designed. Certain school buses have been equipped by their manufacturers with grab handles that have a crevice between the tapered end and the wall to which it is attached. Several children have been killed or seriously injured when strings attached to their clothing or backpacks were caught in this crevice as they exited the bus. The bus drivers, unaware that the children were caught, pulled away from a stop, dragging the children beneath the moving buses. In school buses equipped with a defectively designed grab handle, the installation of a rubber washer eliminates this "catching" hazard. The design defect can be repaired in 30 minutes at a cost of approximately \$10.

Currently, although all safety standard violations concerning a school bus may be considered to jeopardize the safety of the students being transported, DMV inspection procedures allow for three remedial responses. Those violations that are considered serious require that the bus be immediately removed from service until it is repaired. Some violations need to be repaired but the bus is allowed to remain in service until it is repaired for a period of 48 hours after inspection. All other violations need not be repaired until 30 days after inspection. Under this bill, DMV inspectors must check the grab handle to see if it is defectively designed. If the grab handle is defective, the bus is immediately removed from service until it is repaired and reinspected.