

My name is Larry Catlett. I've been driving for First Student in the USD 259 district for 4½ years. I'm writing in support of Senate Bill SB-3, I know it as the "bus driver" bill.

It didn't take me long to realize that driving a school bus requires more than just driving. I soon realized I did not have the tools this job. About three months into the job, I began to understand that it was my responsibility to provide a safe environment for the kids on my bus. To do that, I had to be able to meet them where *they* are.

Sometimes the safest part of their day, is the ride on the school bus. Some children have a lot of issues. Some could be hungry. Some could be abused. Some could have an unsafe family life. There are kids that have autism. Others use wheelchairs. And some have nurses with them on the bus.

I think it requires a lot more attention to detail than just traffic and safety protocols. This job requires skills that can only be developed on the school bus. Our kids at some times can be a handful – I think everyone knows this – even when they are yours.

One challenge is that drivers who have developed these skills and can relate to the needs of the kids are often lost during the summer. They would like to return, but have to find other work and then don't return to the bus. I believe that SB-3 would go a long way toward helping to retain some of these core drivers during off times. The core drivers are a must for continued success in meeting the children where they are at.

I can find little reason why we are the only employees in the state who are disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance, simply because we have a "reasonable assurance" of being hired again after a seasonal 3 month layoff. Our kids need us to be there for them, and experienced at what we do. There is no substitute for knowing how to meet the kids where they are at.

This could only be an economic windfall for everyone involved if less time and money could be spent recruiting, hiring and training new drivers throughout the year. If skilled and experienced drivers (core drivers) could be retained, safety and training personnel could be more useful out in the field.