

January 29, 2015

The Honorable Senator Julia Lynn, Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce
State Capitol, Room 548 South
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: SB 3 Unemployment Benefits For Privately Contracted School Bus Drivers

As a long time School Bus driver for various contract school bus companies, I am now employed by Durham School Service, Overland Park, Kansas. I am writing to register my support for Senate Bill 3, authored by Senator Faust-Goudeau that would end the disqualification of unemployment benefits for School Bus Drivers in the State of Kansas.

Unlike the students that I transport, I do not look forward to the summer months as that will be the time that I must advise my creditors that I will not have enough money to continue to pay my bills such as rent, utilities and basic food needs. Many of my fellow drivers require contacting neighbors and stretching power cords to keep electricity in the refrigerator. They have been contacted by banks to re-posses vehicles or land lords serving eviction notices during this time of no income.

School bus drivers work for a very honorable profession and while some of us do get work with our company's, some go out to try for employment only to find out no one is interested in a two and one half month of employment. The main reason is that training cost do not justify such short term employment. Some of us could be hired as a school bus driver for an academic year and then attempt to seek full time employment elsewhere, but then the students that we transport would lose continuity with the driver they have been assigned. Many of our drivers have been driving the same route for years have very close relationships with their students.

We know the law as many Kansas bus drivers have applied, been rejected, file for a second opinion for an employment judge, once again denied and then send our last appeal to a three member panel who does nothing more than look at KS 44-706 (p) and once again we are denied. Kansas drivers do try and explain that companies such as Durham and First Student also provide service for non-school related activities for the entire year such as Boy Scout camping service, YMCA service, private individual baseball parties and the list goes on.

Let's look at the rule:

The rule for disqualification under KS 44-706 reads as follows:

(p) For any week of unemployment on the basis of service as a school bus or other motor vehicle driver employed by a private contractor to transport pupils, students and school personnel to or from school-related functions or activities for an educational institution, as defined in subsection (v) of K.S.A. 44-703 and amendments thereto, if such week begins during the period between two successive academic years or during a similar period between two regular terms, whether or not successive, if the individual has a contract or contracts, or a reasonable assurance thereof, to perform services in any such capacity with a private contractor for any educational institution for both such academic years or both such terms.

Now let's look at the second sentence of this same law that referees still advise that unemployment benefits do not qualify. The second part of the sentence under section (p) of this rule reads:

An individual shall **not** be disqualified for benefits as provided in this subsection (p) for any week of unemployment on the basis of service as a bus or other motor vehicle driver employed by a private contractor to transport persons to or from non-school related functions or activities.

The school bus contract industry employs in 2012 employed 6590 drivers across Kansas. Not all of these drivers need or require unemployment insurance, but we should have the same benefits as a worker who experiences a lay off from the construction business, airline industry, auto industry and restaurant industry. Discrimination on the basis of our title is not only unfair, but has devastating effects on families. Costs for retraining bus drivers annually can also be very expensive to a contractor and they too have no continuity with their employees.

I ask you on behalf of almost 7000 school bus drivers in Kansas to please repeal this law. Let the rules for all unemployed people be applied to all bus drivers

Sincerely

Pam Ward
School Bus Driver-Blue Valley School District
Overland Park, Kansas