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Division of Highway Traffic Safety, Department of Education Call for Increased Vigilance on Roadways as Students Head Back to School

Stopping for School Buses Loading and Unloading Passengers Vital to Student Safety

TRENTON – As more than 1.4 million students across New Jersey return to school next week, the State Division of Highway Traffic Safety and the New Jersey Department of Education are calling on motorists and students to be extra vigilant on the roadways and obey traffic laws, especially in school zones and along school bus routes.

The first weeks of school can be the most dangerous time on the road for students as they acclimate to rising early and crossing busy streets, and as motorists adjust to sharing the road with school buses.

“The safe passage of students to and from school is a responsibility we all share,” said Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal. “We’re partnering with the Department of Education to raise public awareness of the importance of driving safely and responsibly to help reduce the risks students face as they travel back and forth to school.”

Approximately 700,000 New Jersey students are transported to and from school by bus each day, traversing some 480,000 miles on nearly 42,000 bus routes.

A survey of 1,394 school bus drivers in the state found that on a single day last spring, motorists illegally passed stopped school buses on 793 occasions. The survey, conducted annually by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, counts incidents in which motorists illegally pass buses that are fully stopped with lights flashing and stop signs extended.

“What is most troubling about these statistics is that they represent a one-day snapshot of what is occurring every day on our roadways,” said Education Commissioner Lamont O. Repollet, noting that New Jersey schools must provide a minimum of 180 instruction days a year. “This is

a stark reminder that, as children return to school, adults must also pay attention and become educated on safety.”

“Today, as we prepare for the start of a new school year, we want to make it clear that drivers who violate school-bus stop laws place young lives at great risk,” said Eric Heitmann, Director of the Division of Highway Traffic Safety. “Whether you’re late for work or rushing to get your own children to school on time, there is no excuse for failing to stop for a school bus.”

To take on the issue of school bus safety, school officials work closely with local law enforcement to identify problem areas where motorists routinely disregard school-bus stop laws. Many police departments throughout the state are following buses in unmarked vehicles. And some school districts have begun installing cameras on buses to catch motorists who violate stop-arm laws.

Since January, 1,387 citations have been issued statewide for improper passing of a school bus, a nearly 40 percent increase from the 992 summonses issued during the first seven months of the prior year.

In addition to promoting compliance with school-bus stop laws, the Division of Highway Traffic Safety provides the following tips to help reduce traffic risks and enhance student safety during the school year:

- **Motorists:** Be aware of an increased number of students on the road. Watch out for bicyclists and pedestrians, especially when backing out of a driveway or driving through a neighborhood or school zone. Obey traffic laws, especially in school zones. Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit in a school zone is 25 mph. Student drivers holding graduated licenses must abide by all driving restrictions, including passenger limits.
- **Pedestrians:** Parents and students, walk on sidewalks whenever they are available. If there is no sidewalk, walk facing traffic and as far from traffic as possible. Keep alert at all times; don’t be distracted by electronic devices that take your eyes (and ears) off the road. Cross streets at crosswalks or intersections, where drivers expect pedestrians. Look for cars in all directions, including those turning left or right.
- **Bicyclists:** Always wear a correctly fitted helmet with the chinstrap securely fastened. Ride in the same direction as traffic and follow traffic signs and signals. Use bike lanes whenever possible. Pay attention to traffic at all times and never use electronics that can distract you from what’s going on around you.
- **Parents:** Student drop off and pick up can cause traffic congestion that increase risks to students. The safest place to drop off your child is on the school side of the street, next to the curb. If that is not possible, park your vehicle legally (never double park) and accompany your child (using a crosswalk or at the corner) across the street to the sidewalk in front of the school.

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