

Good Morning,

My name is Pam Minicucci and I have 2 school aged children with food allergies. I was also involved in the advocacy during the 2009 legislative session in passing S.B. 755: An Act Concerning The Use Of Asthmatic Inhalers And Epinephrine Auto Injectors While At school.

I am a Former Emergency Medical Technician with 15 years experience under my belt, currently a school bus driver for 10 years, and a parent of two food allergic children ages 12.5 and 14.5. As you can see by my credentials I live through every aspect, every day, of what this committee is about. I have a personal experience, just recently, while one of my children went on a field trip while at school. I admit that as my children mature to young adults, I have taught them to self advocate when they were young enough to somewhat understand, and now I ease them into totally self advocating for themselves, although I still worry and remind them, "do you have your allergy kits?", "yes mom" is always the answer. That will never stop as long as I'm alive. But to my teen daughters, they no longer want their mom or dad to chaperone their field trips. My 14 year-old was diagnose with tree nut allergy at age 3 and my 12 year old was diagnosed with peanut and tree nut allergy at 3 months of age.

We get that, and we need to let them do this on their own, while us parents secretly feeling useless because there is longer the need of a watchful eye of mom or dad to linger over them like they needed when they were younger. So this brings my story of a field trip that my 12 year old recently took to Hartford to see a Christmas play. As a bus driver, I have never driven a field trip when either of my kids were part of it. The reason being if they had an allergic reaction, who would be there to drive the Bus? You just cant use anyone, you have to be a CDL holder with a school bus endorsement. With that said My daughter went to school that day, and I had a medical appoint at Yale (about 6 hours long). About two hours into my appointment I get a text from daughters teacher, who is chaperoning her group and already enroute to the venue. She informs me that there is no place for the students to eat their lunch and they will eating their lunches on the bus during the ride back to school. She had asked me if I wanted to have my daughter seated towards the front of the bus. I let her know that being confined inside a school bus with the windows closed and the heat on will make no difference where she sits. She would have an allergic reaction if there is peanut butter sandwiches and peanut products consumed on the bus. Mind you, I am employed by the bus company that provided the transportation for this field trip, 7 busses in all were used. There are notices hung in all the busses that state no eating is allowed on the busses due to food allergies, so really they were breaking the rules by allowing students to eat on the bus. The teacher was going to take a poll as to who had peanuts/peanut butter sandwiches. I also called the school principal letting her know what was going on. She apologized to me and was under the impression that students had to get bagged lunches from the school cafeteria, because they would have made sure they were peanut free. But that wasn't the case. The teacher on the bus and the principal collaborated with each other and once they came up with the total of peanut products brought onto the bus, the decision was made as to weather or not to separate the students with peanuts from the non. I would have had a bigger problem if my daughters friend had brought peanuts in her lunch and was made to move to another bus from my daughter. My child has come a long way from the social isolation and stigmatism that goes along with food allergies and for many years she struggled socially. It would have been detrimental to her if she had to be separated from her friend, all because of failure on the schools behalf not to previously find out what dining arrangements would be. As a frantic last minute decision to eat on the bus, they failed to take into the consideration of all the food allergic students, even the ones not in the school, grade or field trip. So you wondering what do I mean by that? Because I am a school bus driver, I know that all of the busses used for the field trip will now have to be cleaned before the dismissal of the high school, middle school and elementary school students who all ride those 7 busses twice a day. Did I notify my place of employment about the eating situation that day? I sure did and also let them know all seats and handrails would have to be cleaned to prevented cross contamination, especially for the youngest of students because they still put their hands in their mouths. Were the busses cleaned? probably not. My daughter that day was able to enjoy the ride home while sitting beside her friend chatting and having lunch. She is growing up and I am preparing her for the real where she will no longer be protect by her 504 Plan or by her dad and I, but for the many elementary students or newly diagnosed students no matter what their age, they need to feel safe while at school and the school bus really is an extension of school and must have protocols in place for these allergic students. My bus is longer used for athletics because coaches bring food on the bus all the time. My daughter had an allergic reaction one time, and she was just a toddler at the time. My two children are not the only

children with food allergies on my bus. I do notify a parent if I'm not driving because part of this student's 504 plan is to make sure the seats are wiped down in the morning and again in the afternoon before this student comes on board. I let them know when I'm not going to be there because I can not guarantee that mother that word would get passed down to the spare driver about cleaning the seats. remember my children are food allergic too. So at least those parents can decide if their child should take the bus that day. As a school bus driver, I wouldn't hesitate in a heartbeat to administer an epi pen. I always carry extra on me. You don't realize how relieved parents are when they find out my background if their own child carries an epi pen.

I can only speak for the company I work for. If a student is having a medical crisis, we drivers have to radio to our dispatcher, let them know what's going on, then the dispatcher has to call 911. Sometimes there is a lot of radio traffic and you can't get through the dispatcher in a timely manner. My bus route has a few "dead spots" in areas where I can't receive or transmit radio communications. School bus drivers are not trained in any kind of medical crisis, ie how to recognize when a medical crisis arises on the bus or in CPR or how to help a student who is choking or if a student is in some kind of distress. As a matter of fact we are told not to engage in conversations or make physical contact with any child for any reason. Precious life saving minutes can be lost and terrible outcomes can happen. If a Driver has the tools and knowledge, in this case epi pens on board and be trained to administer, no student who is on a school bus should have to die because of anaphylaxis. Yes there are parents who still do not let their young children carry epi pens, they think they are too young. Many parents still don't know that their kids have a right to carry. Both my kids have always carried since entering school at age 5.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story,

Pam Minicucci