



NEWS RELEASE

Ted Arnott, MPP
Wellington - Halton Hills

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Facing pressure, Liberals put school bus policy in reverse

(Wellington-Halton Hills) – The McGuinty Liberals have finally backed down on their controversial school transportation procurement policy, which threatened the livelihoods of independent school bus operators in Wellington-Halton Hills and beyond.

“Finally they appear to be listening to us,” said Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott. “But they’re too late for some of the school bus operators who’ve been put out of business.”

Mr. Arnott’s comments followed the Ministry of Transportation’s announcement putting in place a six-month freeze on its procurement policy.

“The Independent School Bus Operators’ Association and the Ontario School Bus Association, as well as many others, deserve credit for putting the pressure on the Liberal government,” said Mr. Arnott. He also praised the efforts of MPP Elizabeth Witmer, who serves as the Progressive Conservative Critic to the Minister of Education, for calling for an immediate moratorium on the Liberal school transportation policy.

“At every turn, I was glad to support the independent school bus operators, and Elizabeth Witmer did a super job advocating for them,” said Mr. Arnott.

Mr. Arnott first raised the issue in the Ontario Legislature on November 25, 2009.

“We entrust our children to the safe care of our courteous and well-trained local school bus drivers,” Mr. Arnott said at that time. “Many of these family businesses have transported students and served our communities for generations.”

Mr. Arnott also met with local school bus operators, and wrote to the Minister of Education on their behalf urging a review of the government’s request-for-proposal tendering process.

“While I’m pleased they’ve finally acknowledged we were right, it’s unfortunate they took so long to change their policy,” Mr. Arnott said. “They’ve stood by and watched as small bussing companies have gone out of business.”

“Obviously this government is out-of-touch when it comes to small business, and it’s clear that Ontario needs a change in government.”

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Attached: Ontario Hansard and Mr. Arnott’s news release (November 26, 2009)

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SCHOOL BUS OPERATORS

Mr. Ted Arnott: Regrettably, the Minister of Education has been silent while independent school bus operators in the county of Wellington are threatened with the total loss of their business. In small-town and rural Ontario, the school bus is ubiquitous, morning and afternoon. We entrust our children to the safe care of our courteous and well-trained local school bus drivers. Many of these family businesses have transported students and served our communities for generations. They are local; they provide an essential service; they are cost-effective; they sponsor local minor sports teams; they buy their fuel, parts, tires and insurance locally; and they are firmly rooted in our communities.

Why would the McGuinty Liberal government want to fix something that isn't broken? On many occasions in recent months, I have met with school bus operators and written the Minister of Education on their behalf urging a review of the minister's flawed request-for-proposal tendering process. We have asked for an alternative approach which would give greater recognition to existing service in the criteria, as well as for a further review of the RFP pilot project and its results.

The minister promised fairness to our local school bus operators, but has delivered the opposite. Surely she understands that the cost of student transportation will only go up over time if our local school bus businesses are driven out of business. If a small number of huge, foreign-owned school bus companies grow to cover the whole province, they will eventually dictate price and dictate it upwards. This is always the way with monopolies. I call on the Minister of Education to keep her promise to school bus operators, halt this RFP process now and ensure that-

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.