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For additional information, contact:
Michael J. Martin at 800-989-6278
John W. Hazelette at 757-892-3320
Peter F. Mannella at 518-463-4937

**STATEMENT ABOUT RECENT NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING (NPRM)
ANNOUNCED BY THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
(NHTSA)**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is the federal regulatory body that our organization and the vast majority of its membership looks to for clear guidance and definitive recommendations on school bus safety issues in general and passenger crash protection in particular.

This is why last February NAPT submitted a formal petition to NHTSA requesting the agency to reevaluate, on a priority basis, FMVSS 222, "School Bus Passenger Seating and Crash Protection," with the goal of establishing a safety system that will definitively enhance the current passenger crash protection for all children that ride a school bus. It was our petition that forced the agency to finally engage in public discussion that it had curiously avoided for a very long time, resulted in a public meeting last summer, and led the agency to issue the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on November 19, 2007.

We are therefore extremely disappointed with the agency's NPRM. Instead of the clarity and direction states, parents and the school bus industry sought and expected, the NPRM adds equivocation and uncertainty to the discussion. For school bus professionals whose full time job is the safe and efficient transportation of children, the NPRM seems rife with inconsistent and illogical statements, many of which are outright confusing, that do not serve the goal of enhancing the safety of children riding on school buses.

Moreover, it contains a serious error, alleging in a footnote that NAPT opposes lap/shoulder belts in school buses. This is not and never has been NAPT's position. We are on record repeatedly and publicly in strong support of compartmentalization but that does not mean we are opposed to any safety measures, including lap/shoulder belts, that can be shown through sound science to improve the safety of children riding in school buses, regardless of cost. NHTSA needs to rectify immediately this misstatement.

We continue to believe sound public safety policy demands that NHTSA use realistic research to determine the need for changes in the current passenger crash protection system, and then work with the industry and states to establish the safety approach(es) that will definitively enhance the current passenger crash protection for all children that ride a school bus. Several statements in the NPRM contradict statements made in the agency's 2002 Report to Congress, yet there is no indication that NHTSA has done additional testing. In our view, the fact that the agency has now arrived at different and purportedly science-based conclusions is dubious and makes it seem as if they are they simply saying what they think people want to hear.

(more)

1840 Western Avenue ■ Albany, NY ■ 12203 ■ www.napt.org
Toll Free: (800) 989-NAPT ■ Tel: (518) 452-3611 ■ Fax: (518) 218-0867

Michael J. Martin, Executive Director

Any changes NHTSA proposes to the existing system of passenger crash protection must be based on valid current research and must not compromise student safety in any way, or require subjective interpretation of confusing choices.

We will be submitting detailed comments to the docket outlining deficiencies and confusion we see in the NPRM and suggesting to NHTSA the clarity that we believe the public, state policymakers and parents expect in terms of clear direction for advancing pupil transportation safety.

In the interim, we renew our request that NHTSA make an active effort to educate the American public about the importance of school bus transportation as a logical way to reduce deaths, injuries and economic losses resulting from motor vehicle crashes. A school bus is the safest form of transportation in America and we encourage NHTSA to tell that to everyone, especially the parents that put 25 million children on a school bus every school day.

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