



# Ontario School Bus Workers Deserve Better

## Steering Clear: Avoiding the RFP Trap

The Ontario government has changed the rules for the province's school bus industry. Student transportation contracts are now awarded through a complex and competitive Request-for-Proposal (RFP) bidding system, unlike the much simpler (although still competitive) process used by school boards in past. In practice, this RFP system has forced large operators to give up routes, resulting in yard closures throughout the province; and it has driven small, independent operators out of business.

For school bus drivers, this new RFP system is causing distress. Bus maintenance and repair work is being neglected as operators strive to keep costs down. And a wave of job losses is sweeping across the province, having already affected hundreds of union and non-union workers in the past two years alone. As local school transport consortia roll out more RFPs we know there are many more job cuts to come. Worse still, many drivers who have lost their jobs are being re-hired by the contractors who won the bid to take their work. That means these drivers are doing the exact same work, just with a different operator – often at a lower wage and fewer workplace protections.

School bus drivers are already the lowest paid transit workers in Ontario - even though they are responsible for carrying our children, our most precious cargo. Many earn at (or near) the minimum wage, and very few have access to workplace benefits. Drivers do this work for the love of the kids, and not just for the money. But that doesn't justify the added pain this RFP system is putting them through.

As Ontario's largest school bus driver's union, Unifor is concerned about the lasting impacts this RFP system will

have on both school bus drivers and our kids. Our concerns centre on:

- **SAFETY:** Contract bidding will force operators to compete on lowering costs, further delaying much-needed bus maintenance work (including proper bus sanitization) and repair – putting the health and safety of our kids at risk;
- **WORK STANDARDS:** As competition increases, operators will be forced to squeeze labour costs. That means persistently low wages and more unpaid work time for drivers;
- **LABOUR RIGHTS:** If unionized workers lose their jobs, gaps in federal and provincial labour law mean they also lose their collective agreement if re-hired by a new firm.

A government-commissioned review of the RFP system proposed a series of important changes, but ultimately concluded that it is here to stay – at least for the foreseeable future. It conforms to Ontario's Broader Public Sector Procurement Directive (the provincial guidebook for how hospitals, universities, school boards and others ought to purchase goods and services) and is considered a 'best practice.' Unfortunately, in this case, this best practice for the province and school boards isn't in the best interest of workers or our kids.

Unifor will continue to advocate for a fairer, less disruptive model for procuring student transportation – one that is well-funded and provides good, stable jobs for workers. However, even with an RFP system in place there is MUCH that our governments (both federal and provincial) can do to enhance safety, raise work standards and protect our rights.

## Government must:

- **Implement a fair wage for school bus drivers:**

The Ministry of Education must increase its annual Student Transportation Grant to provide all Ontario school bus drivers a much-needed, and immediate, wage enhancement. Additionally, the Ministry must establish a minimum wage standard for drivers of \$15 per hour that guards against further wage declines. This rate should increase, each year, in line with inflation and should be paid on all tasks performed during a work shift.

- **Protect collective bargaining rights:**

Federal and provincial labour legislation must be amended to ensure that winning RFP bidders maintain existing school bus driver collective agreements, when they are already in place. Labour ministries should also explore provisions that would assist in the establishment of industry-wide collective agreements, to set adequate baseline work standards for school bus drivers across the province.

- **Increase safety inspections:**

The Ministry of Transportation must expand its monitoring of school transportation with more regular and random inspections of buses, ensuring all unsafe buses are adequately repaired or taken off the road.

## How you can help!

### Sign the online petition + share your story

Let our elected government officials know how the RFP has affected you, and share with them Unifor's list of recommendations and proposals. You can find a link to the petition at [www.unifor.org/schoolbuscampaign](http://www.unifor.org/schoolbuscampaign).

### Tell a friend

It's not just bus drivers that must speak out. We need parents, friends, students and other allies too! So, share the petition and spread the word.

### Talk to your local MPP

Contact your local Member of Provincial Parliament ([www.ontla.on.ca/lao/en/members/](http://www.ontla.on.ca/lao/en/members/)). Pass along our campaign information and ask to have a short meeting. See if they will stand in support of Ontario school bus drivers. Contact the Unifor Political Action and Membership Mobilization Department for support! [roland.kiehne@unifor.org](mailto:roland.kiehne@unifor.org)

### Join the mailing list

Email Unifor Local 4268 President Deb Montgomery to join the campaign mailing list. You'll receive regular updates and information: [unifor4268@gmail.com](mailto:unifor4268@gmail.com)

For more information, visit: [www.unifor.org/schoolbuscampaign](http://www.unifor.org/schoolbuscampaign)



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