



June 14th 2018

Minister of State John Halligan
Department of Education and Skills,
Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1
D01 RC96

Dear Minister Halligan,

I have written extensively on School Transport over the years on behalf of the members of FOTO, the Federation of Transport Operators which represents over 1,100 small to medium family owned bus and coach owners. These family owned businesses have been providing school transport services under contract to Bus Éireann since 1967 and, for some, it is their main income earner living as they do in the most rural areas of the country.

I am writing to you today because this State company has engaged in a tendering process for the last 10 years or more that has cut costs the in this sub-contracted service, not their own services you will know, to now levels that are unviable. This is now forcing large numbers of these family owned businesses to finally accept that they can no longer provide a safe service.

This decision by these small to medium family owned businesses is coming after many years of knowing that these services were not viable but continued only in the hope that the State company would realise this at some stage, it seems not. The decision by these small to medium bus and coach operators was also delayed as their vehicles were upgraded following the tragic accident in Kentstown but that now have reached the point where they must be replaced, this is simply not possible at the present levels of payment for these services.

Added to this the introduction of the Driver CPC has reduced the number of drivers available to provide these services on a part-time/casual basis only. The earlier model, where older drivers were employed and who proved to be most suitable on many fronts where children are concerned is no longer possible through a policy by this State company to refuse driving over the age of 70 - you will know Minister that FOTO has a complaint lodged with the EU Commission in the regard of Bus Éireann's refusal to allow drivers over the age of 70 to drive buses on the School Transport service.

A new round of tendering for these service will commence for the new school year next September and I wish to give you notice now Minister that you may find a difficulty in providing these services if the steady stream of these decisions to not tender by our members manifests to any great extent.

I am genuinely concerned Minister that the rates for the School Transport System are well below levels required to provide a safe, secure and commercially viable service. I have proffered various solutions to your Department over many years and recently to you under both FOTO and the iBus plc concepts without success but perhaps now it will be seen that the very safety of our children is at stake and we must act now to protect them.

I will be happy to meet you to discuss further should you so wish.

Yours Sincerely

John Dunne
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