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SCHOOL BUS STOP ARM VIOLATIONS TAKE UNFORTUNATE JUMP, MSDE FINDS

SURVEY SHOWS MANY DRIVERS IGNORE SCHOOL BUS WARNING

BALTIMORE (September 6, 2016) – Drivers are not paying the necessary attention to the stop arms on school buses, a new Maryland State Department of Education-sponsored survey has found.

Stop arms swing out from a bus and lights flash whenever it is making an on-roadway student pick-up. A total of 4,326 violations of school bus stop arms were recorded on a single day last spring. Although well below the 7,011 recorded when the survey began in 2011, the number represents a significant jump over the 2,795 recorded in 2015.

“Maryland schools have re-opened for the new year, and all drivers must re-focus on the safety of our children. It is illegal to pass a bus with its stop arm extended and its lights flashing,” said Dr. Karen B. Salmon, State Superintendent of Schools. “It is clear that we have more to do as we all work to keep students out of harm’s way.”

MSDE coordinated the survey in April along with school transportation directors in all 24 school systems. It is considered a snapshot of illegal activity on the roads. Seventy-six percent of Maryland school bus drivers took part in the survey.

Violations had been on a steady decline since the survey was launched, making the 2016 increase particularly concerning. School systems, bus drivers, and law enforcement have been raising awareness about stop arm violations for the past six years.

Large systems with more buses and bus routes noted the most violators. Baltimore County tallied the most – 1,002, followed closely by 999 witnessed by Montgomery County school bus drivers. Both systems found significant increases. Prince George’s, Anne Arundel, Howard and Harford all saw increases in their totals. Baltimore City drivers, however, found the number of stop arm violations nearly cut in half, from 224 in 2015 to 128 in 2016. Drivers in four small counties -- Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset, and Talbot – did not witness any violations, while Garrett and Queen Anne’s reported one each and Kent tallied two.

Concerns over school bus safety prompted Governor Larry Hogan last month to release more than \$500,000 to local law enforcement agencies to help them enforce Maryland school bus safety laws. The grants will be used to pay for overtime for police officers who patrol streets when school buses are

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on the road, and for public education programs to inform the driving public about Maryland's law requiring drivers to stop when a school bus has stopped to pick up or drop off passengers.

The MSDE survey this past spring was undertaken at the behest of a number of members of the Maryland General Assembly, which has been monitoring school bus safety. The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services is coordinating surveys of this type in all 50 States.

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