

## **Opening Statement**

Good morning and welcome to the Boardroom of the National Transportation Safety Board.

I am Robert Sumwalt, and I'm honored to serve as the Chairman of the NTSB. Joining us today are my colleagues on the Board, Member Earl Weener and Member Bella Dinh-Zarr.

Today, we meet in open session, as required by the Government in the Sunshine Act, to consider a Special Investigation Report on Selective Issues in School Bus Safety. The Report brings together our investigations of two recent school bus crashes: the collision of a school bus with a transit bus in Baltimore, Maryland, and a single-vehicle crash in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

I want to impress upon everybody before we begin, that yes, the school bus is still statistically the safest way to get to school. The report we will deliberate today is not about choosing another option. It is about closing gaps in school bus safety—because the gaps that we found were glaring, and the results of those gaps were as tragic as they were unnecessary.

A total of 12 people died in these two crashes. In the Baltimore crash, these included the school bus driver and the transit bus driver, along with four transit bus passengers. In the Chattanooga crash, six boys and girls ranging in age from six to nine years old lost their lives. All told, dozens of others were injured, many of them seriously.

My colleagues and I offer our sincerest condolences to those who lost loved ones. We hope that all those who were injured are on the way to the fullest possible recovery.

To the parents of Chattanooga, as a parent myself, I can only imagine what you have been through. And to the loved ones of those lost in Baltimore, I know that grief knows no age. School bus safety means protecting our children. And, school buses are large, heavy vehicles. Their safe operation is critical to protecting all road users.

We're here today to learn from both these crashes, to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

I said earlier that school bus transportation is statistically very safe, and it's true. But to an individual, safety is binary. A child--or an adult--is either in a crash, or he isn't. There should be zero chance of such a tragedy when we entrust a life to a

school bus driver—or failing that, as close to zero chance as possible.

Tragically, that's not what we found in our investigations.

Rather, in both crashes, we saw poor driver oversight, both by the school districts and by the contracted motor carriers that provided student transportation services.

In the abstract, unsafe drivers are a hazard, unsafe systems allow hazards to persist, and systems cannot be safe without effective oversight.

In concrete terms, neither of these drivers should have been behind the wheel. The driver in Tennessee had a series of complaints against him for unsafe driving practices. The Baltimore driver was prone to seizures, including while driving. Both issues were known before the respective crashes. Both crashes could have been prevented; neither one was.

Two other safety issues in the Baltimore crash touch on related topics: Medically unfit school bus drivers, and optimal use of facial recognition software to catch commercial driver license fraud.

We'll also discuss safety enhancements for school buses, ranging from seat belts to technologies such as electronic stability control, automatic emergency braking, and event data recorders.

Public safety must come first—including the safety of our children, and of all road-users.

Today, the NTSB staff will briefly present the most pertinent facts and analysis found in the draft report, which is 148 double-spaced pages in length. The public dockets for these two accidents are available at [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov). Together they contain 143 items comprising 2,900 pages of additional information.

Staff have pursued all avenues in order to propose findings, probable causes, and recommendations to the Board. We on the Board will then question staff to ensure that the report, as adopted, truly provides the best opportunity to enhance safety.

Now Managing Director Dennis Jones, if you would kindly introduce the staff.

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