

## School bus drivers to receive random drug tests

Law prohibits alcohol 8 hours before shift

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ALBANY – Gov. Andrew Cuomo has signed a bill aiming to crack down on impaired school bus operators from getting behind the wheel.

The new law, which will take effect in 120 days, requires all bus drivers throughout the state to be eligible for random drug and alcohol screenings.

It also prohibits school bus drivers from drinking alcohol eight hours prior to their shift, up from the previous six hours.

There have been at least four incidents since 2012 in which a school bus operator has been arrested for operating a school bus while intoxicated, according to the bill.

The bill cleared both chambers of the Legislature this past session and was signed into law Friday.

It was sponsored by Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, D-Endwell, Broome County, and Sen. Carl Marcellino, RNassau County. “When a child leaves home and gets on the school bus, no parent should have to worry if their child is safe,” Marcellino said in a statement. “It is our responsibility to do everything that we can to put their well-being first. This bill will do just that.”

Under previous law and federal rules, drivers operating mini-buses carrying under 16 passengers were not required to submit to drug and alcohol testing, according to a sponsors’ memo attached to the bill.

Only 10 percent of a motor carrier’s drivers, meanwhile, were subject to random drug screenings, though many individual school districts had tougher requirements, according to the memo.

Under the new law, all school bus drivers will be placed in the pool for random drug screenings, including those driving small vehicles.

It also ensures that school districts’ cost of drug testing is eligible for reimbursement from the state.

“This legislation will strengthen current oversight of school bus drivers by ensuring that all drivers are subject to random drug and alcohol testing regardless of their commercial driver’s endorsement and increasing the pool for random testing to 100 percent of the drivers employed by a motor carrier,” the sponsors’ memo reads.

The new law drew praise from the New York Association for Pupil Transportation, which represents the school bus industry.

Peter Mannella, the association’s executive director, said the new law will help “assure parents that their children are in safe hands at all times.”

The association had pushed for the bill’s passage since it was first introduced in 2014.

“We never want to explain to parents or to the public why a compromised bus driver had been given the keys to drive a school bus,” Mannella said in a statement.

“That should never happen. We just helped ensure that it never does.”



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