

MP Urges Government to Overhaul School Minibus Safety Regulations After 30-Year Campaign

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In a passionate House of Commons debate on February 12, Labour MP Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) called for sweeping reforms to school minibus safety, highlighting a “two-tier system” that leaves state school children at greater risk compared to those in private institutions. The debate, inspired by the tragic 1993 M40 crash that claimed 12 children and a teacher, including Edwards’ constituent Claire Fitzgerald, underscored the need for mandatory professional training and stricter regulations.

Edwards, joined by the NASUWT union and bereaved parents Liz and Steve Fitzgerald, criticized the current Section 19 permit system under the Transport Act 1985. This allows teachers with only a standard car license and minimal experience to drive minibuses without full passenger-carrying vehicle (PCV) qualifications or accredited training.

“Children’s safety should not be up for debate,” Edwards said. “Why should a child’s safety depend on the type of school they attend? This is unfair and unacceptable.”

She pointed to inconsistencies: private schools must employ licensed drivers and transport managers, while state schools rely on advisory guidance. Edwards also

raised concerns over lightweight minibuses, driver fatigue, and varying standards across the UK, including stricter rules in Northern Ireland. A 2024 NASUWT survey revealed 24% of teachers felt pressured to drive despite feeling unqualified, with the union advising against it due to liability risks.

Labour MP Leigh Ingham (Stafford) intervened, questioning why someone failing a D1 test could still drive school minibuses. Edwards agreed, calling it a “stark and troubling inconsistency.”

In response, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Transport Lilian Greenwood acknowledged improvements since 1993, such as mandatory seatbelts, but committed to further discussions between the Departments for Transport and Education. She highlighted the government’s road safety strategy, aiming for a 70% reduction in child road casualties by 2035, and openness to refining guidance.

Edwards proposed mandating D1 licenses for all school drivers, phasing out lightweight vehicles, creating a national inspection regime, and including transport safety in Ofsted checks. “These are essential steps to guarantee every child’s safety,” she concluded, urging decisive action.

The debate, ending with Deputy Speaker Nusrat Ghani’s recess wishes, renews focus on preventing future tragedies amid ongoing campaigns.

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