HOW COVID-19 HAS KILLED OUR INDUSTRY

Letters to Congress from the Women Who Power America’s Motorcoach Industry

Presented by:

American Bus Association

Women in Buses

In partnership with

BUS Ride
Dear esteemed members of Congress:

On behalf of motorcoach operators, travel and tourism organizations and everyone involved in promoting and supporting group travel, thank you for taking the time to allow our industry to share the story of Women in Buses.

Women in Buses was established in 2011 as council within the American Bus Association. The council recognizes and advances the role of women in the motorcoach industry through networking, education and mentoring programs. The council continues to elevate the impact and the voice of women represented among the motorcoach, tour and travel industry.

Since March, most of those businesses have halted all operations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of these businesses have shut down operations, furloughed staff and team members. Motorcoach owners, many of which are small family owned, multi-generational businesses, have been forced to navigate the role of multiple jobs within their organization working seven days per week, from sun up to sun down, to ensure the survival of their business with nearly 18 months of little to no revenue. These are also the same women working to feed families, raise children, home school and maintain home environments because of closures, all while maintaining a professional career in the tour, travel and motorcoach industry.

As this pandemic continues to challenge our industry, we are continually amazed at the strength of those associated with the motorcoach, tour and travel industry. The fight to save their business and organizations is endless, but this industry is filled with brilliant driven women. Women in Buses continues to forge forward finding new ways to engage and support the industry and those in need of resources while they help everyone come together in a way never experienced before. Competition, differences in operations and even personal beliefs have been set aside to ensure survival during the worst economic times the industry has ever experienced. Women in Buses is a true testament of the statement “we are stronger together” and the stories included in this booklet reflect our common effort and need as we come together.

In closing, thank you again for the support of the motorcoach, travel and tourism industry and the forward momentum of females across our organizations, Women in Buses and the American Bus Association. we are honored and proud to share these members’ stories with the congressional delegation.

Sincerely,

Peter Pantuso – President/CEO
American Bus Association

Elizabeth Hall – Women in Buses Chair
John Hall's Alaska

Pantuso

Hall
Dear members of Congress,

The motorcoach industry ground to a standstill because of COVID-19 and the nationwide state quarantines. Despite the best efforts of industry associations and leaders, the damage inflicted upon motorcoach operators was not addressed in the original the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (or “CARES Act”). In fact, motorcoaches were the only major mode of transportation not specifically addressed by the CARES Act.

As a result of the pandemic, most of the nearly 100,000 people employed in this industry have been laid off or furloughed as over-the-road group transportation is halted nationwide. These people normally provide 500 to 600 million annual passenger trips. They are crucial to America’s travel and tourism industry — which accounts for an annual $237 billion contribution to the economy.

These same people are instrumental in disaster relief and the movement of American troops. Almost 600 motorcoach companies are approved by the Department of Defense to transport military personnel, and as many as 600 buses have been utilized by FEMA to evacuate people from hurricanes and natural disasters. If these companies do not survive in the economy this pandemic created, who will be there to provide those services?

It is critical that Congress pass S. 4150, The Coronavirus Economic Relief for Transportation Services (or Act (or “CERTS” Act), introduced by Senators Jack Reed (Rhode Island) and Susan Collins (Maine). Motorcoach operators have thus far fought to survive on the Paycheck Protection Program and loans from the Small Business Administration, with no direct relief in sight. All the while making sure that their vehicles and facilities are properly maintained and sanitized.

It is going to be some time before motorcoaches are rolling again, and even longer before the industry can return to a state of good financial health. The $10 billion in funding outlined by the CERTS Act will help keep this vital sector of the American economy alive.

We humbly ask for your consideration and thank you for taking the time to read these letters.

Richard Grant Tackett
CEO / Editor in Chief
BUSRide Magazine
Dear Delegation of Alaska –

My name is Joan Farnsworth and I live in Palmer, AK. In the winter, I drive a school bus for First Student in the Mat-School District. In the summer, I drive motorcoaches for John Hall’s Alaska. 2020 marks the 11th summer working for the Halls. I started out as a staff driver picking up guests at the airport to take them to their hotels and driving empty coaches to various locations while the guests were traveling via Alaska Railroad or across Prince Williams Sound on Stan Stephens’ Glacier and Wildlife Cruises. Eventually, I progressed to a tour manager. I have so enjoyed working in this industry and being able to show guests from all over the world the beauties of Alaska.

Generally, one of the early signs of spring’s coming is seeing motorcoaches out and about with new representatives being trained for the upcoming season. This year, I have not seen a single motorcoach out on the road, even prior to state closures. As things closed down and people started staying home, the hope was it would not last more than a few weeks. We could return to normal business, anticipating the coming summer and guests arriving. Obviously, that has not happened.

Unemployment can only go so far in helping the people of Alaska. The impact of tourists not coming this summer is going to be widespread and devastating. There are many businesses that rely on the income from tourism allowing for survival during the long winters. Many businesses which are not associated with tourism will also be greatly affected due to the trickle-down effect. Alaskans will only spend money on essentials. I fear that the impact of this will not fully raise its ugly head until the deep darkness of winter has descended upon our state.

I have been blessed thus far as my husband has been able to continue working for the Alaska Railroad. Even the railroad has been greatly impacted by a drop in oil prices combined with a loss of revenue due to the halt in tourism. The loss of tourism is, and will continue affecting all aspects of life in Alaska. Few are invincible to the negative impacts of this situation. COVID-19 has planted a seed of fear in most Alaska residents. The continued loss of income now result in the possible loss of everything business or people have worked for. This very real threat continues to plant a much scarier seed in Alaskan’s verse the illness itself.

It is vitally important for Alaska’s health that congress continue to recognize the importance of tourism, not only in Alaska but across the entire United States. What might seem like a luxury to many is in reality, the lifeblood to those whose livelihood depends on it. Many tourism businesses ad motorcoach organizations are suffering without support from our federal government.

The tourism industry fills the heart and soul of those who are able to get out and about. Those individuals who can experience and learn about our great state develop greater pride in what we are blessed with. As they see the beauty and hear the history of the places visited, they develop a greater sense of community and have a continued desire to contribute in positive way to this world we live in. Tourism has the effect of helping foster hope for a better future for Alaska and all those around us.

Sincerely,

Joan Farnsworth
Tour Manager
John Hall’s Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska
651-345-1212
Dear Ms. Harris and Mr. Cook,

I would like to take this time to introduce myself, where I'm employed, and how COVID19 has impacted both. My name is Jennifer and I have lived in the high desert (Victorville) my whole life. My mother, who is 85 years old lives with me. My family settled in the high desert when my father was transferred to George Air Force Base in the late 60's.

For the last 18 years 10 months I have been employed with H & L Charter Co., Inc. I received my first CA special certificate as a school bus driver in 2000 and while on a school field trip in 2001 I meet the senior driver's at the time for H & L Charter. I knew at that moment I wanted to switch to motorcoaches. My first position with them was strictly as a motorcoach operator. From the very beginning I couldn't believe the things I was getting to do and get paid for it at the same time. I did several after school and university sports trips, which was perfect for me because I love to watch sports. I also did several high school bands on multiple day trips to various competitions up and down the state of California as well as to Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico.

In the beginning we did numerous trips to the Nevada state-line as well as Laughlin, NV. While on these trips I got to enjoy the company of my passengers that treat you as one of the group as well as watch sports, gamble, see the beautiful scenery along the way and at the destination. As my length in time with the company grew so did our clientele. Now driver's where getting to experience going on extended multiday trips, 5 to 14 days, and traveling to place such as Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Bryce Canyon, and Zion just to name a few. I was even lucky enough to drive athletes for the winter Special Olympics in Idaho. As you can see I have been fortunate with my chosen profession.

But none of this would have been possible had the owners of H & L Charter not taken a chance on me with such little experince. H & L Charter is on its third-generation president. The two generations I've had the pleasure of working for are both women. Maybe this is why everyone that works here always says “they treat you like family” or maybe it's just in their genes. Either way, it has been a joy. As my years of service have grown and my mother has aged the president of H & L has allowed me to expand my role with the company. I have transitioned to the Safety Director/ State Certified Trainer with the company. This has allowed me the time to be home more often for taking care of my mother and her needs without having to find a different carrier. It has also been helpful in the fact that as I sit here and write this I, unlike our drivers, am back to working my full time schedule, but only after a two-month furlough. What many people don't know is that March, April, May and the beginning of June are the busiest times of the year for motorcoach companies. As you do know, this is exactly when the US pandemic of COVID19 basically shut the country down. Companies all over the US went from dispatching their whole fleet of vehicles to the entire fleet sitting. Even as our state and the rest of the country starts to reopen there are still guidelines regarding large group gatherings. Not to mention that people are leery of being in a confined space for long periods at a time. While I understand the Cares Act and PPP Loans are designed to help with small/family owned businesses like ours (and 90% of motorcoach companies and their 100,000 employees) the guidelines are not realistic to meet in the motorcoach industry when we don't have clients to move and therefore cannot bring back our entire staff (office, mechanic's, driver's).

While lenders, manufactures and insurance companies have tried to work with our industry those companies, like everyone else need to make money. Airlines, trains and some transit systems have received bail out money and in some cases are looking for more; the motorcoach industry was somehow ove looked. Compared to the billions that has been given to the afore mentioned industries I don't believe 15 billion to keep America Moving is too much to ask. Motorcoaches are second only to the airlines in the amount of people we move and as one big family have helped each other through the previous difficult times of the country. This time we are asking for your help. Some of us won't be there when you need us for reunions, military, FEMA evacuations, sporting events or the day trip to the casino without your help. Your help, will also help, keep myself, my co-workers and the hundreds of thousands trickledown effect related to the motorcoach industry employed.

Sincerely,

Jennifer S Roark
Director of Safety
H & L Charter
Rancho Cucamonga, California
909-466-3984
The Honorable Pete Aguilar  
109 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Kamala Harris  
U. S. Senate  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Ms. Harris and Mr. Aguilar,

I have been working in the Charter Bus Industry for the past five years. After relocating from the San Diego area back to my hometown of Rancho Cucamonga, I found myself in need of a job with the flexibility to allow me to both work full time and take care of two small children. I was hired at H & L Charter Co., Inc. in December of 2014. I started answering phones in the front office and doing sales, worked my way up into the accounting department and then into marketing. My job in the motorcoach and travel industry has not only allowed me to pay my bills, it has also enabled me to provide medical insurance for my family, and save for the future by enrolling in the 401K plan, all while allowing me to arrange my own schedule which helps me to balance both my career and home life.

Working in this industry over the past 6 months has been interesting. We started off the year on a very promising note with our sales for January and February being the highest in the company's history. In March, during the two weeks leading up to the California shelter in place order, my office received an on slot of phone calls from our clients, one after another, cancelling their trips. The volume of calls was overwhelming, to say the least. The coronavirus pandemic created an eerie atmosphere here as it became very obvious to all of the employees that our company was hemorrhaging money with no end in sight. And then came the California shelter in place order, essentially shutting our business down. The orders that have banned groups from gathering, have left the Motorcoach Industry with no clients (groups) to move.

The impact this has had on my personal quality of life has been difficult. When the order initially came out, we expected it to last for only two weeks. That was going to be a small financial hardship for my family, but it was a brief period with an end date, so it was manageable. Now that the circumstances have changed and appear to be open-ended, our situation has changed. Not knowing whether or not our personal savings will get us through this undefined amount of time, or how long our mortgage company (or other loan companies) will allow us to defer our payments is stressing me out. And these stresses have lead to other stresses in my marital relationship as well as our relationships with extended family and friends.

H & L Charter Co., Inc. is a charter bus company that provides GROUP transportation, so the longer groups are not allowed to gather, the longer we are not able to move them and therefore not able to work. Our company is treading water and I don’t know how much longer it will be able to survive without income. The Cares Act PPP Loan was supposed to help companies bring back all of their employees, thus stimulating a company’s growth and survival … but I do not see how this can work as intended for the motorcoach industry if our clientele is still not allowed to gather … we have no clients to move.

As I understand it, the airlines and public transportation systems (like Amtrak) have received billions in bailout from our government. Similar to those industries, the motorcoach industry provides transportation for large groups of people, yet we have not been included in or considered for any bailout programs. If Congress would help us with this, it would create enormous hope throughout our industry. Like H & L Charter, 90 percent of motorcoach companies are family owned and operated small businesses and assistance from our government would mean so much to us. Personally, for me it would mean a relief in my stress level. I would be able to relax regarding my constant fear that my company may need to close its doors any day now and I will be out of a job that I love.

Sincerely,

Wendy Arany  
Director of Sales  
H & L Charter  
Rancho Cucamonga, California  
909-466-3984
Dear Senator Harris,

I write today to urge you to ensure that any assistance provided by the Congress to address the economic downturn COVID-19 include the motorcoach, tour and travel industries. This worldwide pandemic has impacted us to a level that no one could have ever predicted. Our industry is a resilient one as we have ridden out storms before, but nothing like this. Without Federal assistance, there is a good chance that many companies will not make it to the other side.

I am part of a family owned business, Transportation Charter Services (TCS), located in Orange, CA. We are a motorcoach operator providing charter services for leisure tour groups, school groups, athletic groups which includes, high school, college and professional teams as well as private charters. The impact of COVID-19 to our business has been devastating. In mid-March we saw our entire book of business disappear. We had a workforce of 130 employees including our drivers and are now down to a mere shadow of that as suspensions, cancellations and closures continue. The world is starting to reopen, but for our industry it will be slow to recover.

My role with TCS is Vice President of Sales. I absolutely love what I do and work hard to ensure our drivers have a lot of work to keep them busy. My start in the hospitality industry began in 1996 where I worked in Virginia Beach as a Director of Sales for a hotel. I spent 13 years filling the hotel with mainly tour groups that arrived on motorcoaches. This is where I came to love and appreciate the world of travel and this very special industry. I have been attending the American Bus Association Marketplace for over 20 years. The wonderful people that I have met over the years have become like family to me. It was through the industry that I met my husband who just happened to be a “Bus Guy”. With time, we made our way to California with the purchase of TCS. With our amazing TCS team, we have spent the past 8 years growing our company from 18 to 80 vehicles. We so desperately want to bring our drivers and staff back to doing what we truly love to do, but we just do not know when that day will come.

As Congress reviews and develops strategies to help industries facing severe economic losses by this outbreak, I want to ensure the motorcoach, tour and travel industries are not forgotten. Our drivers miss being on the road and sharing once in a lifetime experiences with our groups. We need assistance to ensure that our company and our fellow operators have the much-needed support from you to make sure the industry itself is not devastated by this crisis.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Fischer
Vice President of Sales
Transportation Charter Services
Orange, California
714-637-4300
June 26, 2020

Dear Senators Scott and Rubio, and Representative Demings,

We have had the good fortune to work in the private motorcoach industry for over 21 years. During that time, we have seen a number of events that have impacted the industry ranging from the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the outbreak of SARS and our national recession. While all of these very unfortunate events had a dramatic impact on our industry, none of them have impacted us as swiftly and severely as the current COVID-19 pandemic. We work for ABC Companies, which is a family owned and privately held motorcoach distributor, selling new and pre-owned coaches, in addition to providing, parts, service and finance programs for the US Motorcoach market. We have locations throughout the US and in your state which support an industry of 3,000 motorcoach operators with over 36,000 buses moving Americans throughout the country, connecting public transportation, airlines, cruise ships and more. These businesses make up our customer base, most of which are also family owned and operated. Because they are not part of the public transportation sector, and not associated with the airlines or Amtrak, they did not receive any directed relief funds, putting the entire industry at risk. As an industry that connects people, places and other modes of transportation, we are easily overlooked, although our services are critical to our country. Private motorcoaches are used to evacuate entire communities when disaster strikes. They are also used to move more of our soldiers domestically than any other form of transportation. They move seniors and students and offer affordable travel options to those who do not have access to public transportation. All the while, we dramatically reduce the national carbon footprint removing on average 36 cars for every motorcoach on the road. We also take great pride in being the safest over the road transportation in our country.

Unfortunately, this humble industry literally came to an immediate halt the moment social distancing and stay at home orders went into effect. Our vehicles have been parked and over 80% of our 100,000 employees were laid off. As we are not an industry that relies on handouts, our creativity and passion for serving the traveling public has always prevailed. However, when government orders were put into place, we have watched our business cease. Although the SBA loan assistance programs have been helpful for those who have been able to access funds, the bulk of our business expenses are vehicle purchase and maintenance, followed by ever rising insurance costs. We are a capital-intensive industry because of the equipment we must use to serve the traveling public. Because of this, our industry associations have asked Congress for $15 Billion in directed funds to help our businesses remain solvent while waiting for America to reopen. As a distributor to this industry, we have suffered alongside our customers. Sales have practically diminished as so few buses are moving. This trickles across all of our businesses as they are designed to assist this highly fragmented industry. While ABC Companies has not requested specific funds, we need assistance for our customers or the industry is at risk of failing and leaving so many Americans, visitors, students, seniors, soldiers and more without a way to get to their destination.

We believe it will take $15 Billion of dedicated funds to ensure our industry survives given current projections. Therefore, we are asking if we can count on you and your staff to support our industry and represent our needs during the many government relief funding discussions and ultimately legislation development.

We would be happy to share more information and discuss how you and your staff can assist this industry.

Attached is a link to a video we produced when the stay at home orders first began: https://youtu.be/o3ty_jKz65o

Even after multiple relief packages, the message remains as we ask that you not miss our bus.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ashley Cornell
Vice President of Strategic Accounts
ABC Companies
Winter Garden, Florida
407-287-3060

Ryhan Cornell
Account Manager
ABC Companies
Winter Garden, Florida
407-287-3016
Honorable Marco Rubio  
284 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

Honorable Rubio,

My name is Wanda Irizarry. My family owned a trucking company in Puerto Rico, that is where I learned to love the large vehicles - the 18-wheelers. After I graduated from high school, I moved to Orlando, Florida. I started to work as a school bus driver for Orange County Public Schools in Orlando. I did that for nine years. I went back to my family roots and started trucking across America. I was on the road months at a time, so I was missing my family. It really got to me so after 18 years I knew I needed to be home more often. I left the trucking business and started with motorcoaches. I have been in the motorcoach business for the last five years. What an experience, my favorite run was an adult group to The Ark and Creation Museums. I felt I was part of the group. The laughing and comradery on that coach is something I will never forget. I have moved churched groups, school groups and senior groups. I love moving sports groups, especially the local college. The most scenic trip that took my breath away was a nine-day trip to the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore. Not only was I amazed at what I saw but you should have seen and hear the comments from my group. Most of them had never been that far away from home. It is wonderful that a motorcoach can fulfill a bucket list item and help people live their travel dream.

I do have concerns moving forward. Florida's largest product is tourism. As we are hearing the nation is opening up, the fact remains, that we are still dead in the water in Florida. Our motorcoach industry was left out of any government assistance, all while airlines received healthy assistance. Let's all be reminded motorcoaches in this country move nearly as many passengers annually around the U.S as the top three domestic airlines do. While all eyes are everywhere else and our representation in Florida is not speaking loud enough and saying, that Florida is unique and is still suffering the effects of curbed tourism, my industry needs to be considered for future assistance, or it is at serious risk of dying.

My hope is in the near future to be back behind the wheel and moving passengers around safely, however that cannot effectively happen if people are too afraid to travel and vacation.

Sincerely,

Wanda Irizarry  
Driver  
MCA Transportation  
Orlando, Florida  
407-226-2256
The Honorable Rick Scott  
716 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

Honorable Rick Scott,

My name is Lois Turco. I started driving school buses in Rochester, New York, in 1989. I was a young mother of two girls. Wanting to be a mom and raise my own children, I started driving school buses for the years they were in school. After they graduated from high school, I decided to move back to my childhood home of Orlando, FL. This was in 2003. I decided to try the motorcoach side of the business since the children no longer needed me as much and I could go over the road if needed. I have had an adventurous 17 years so far. From taking groups to see Orlando's famous attractions like Walt Disney World, Universal and SeaWorld; to school groups heading to Gatorland and the Orlando Science Center, I have covered everything in Orlando. From the rockets’ red glare: taking groups to see the SpaceX launches and feeling the ground shake beneath my feet as the rockets lifted off; being in Washington D.C. and hearing the Navy band and seeing parachutes landing at Fort Myer; seeing our beautiful coastlines in the northeast especially Martha's Vineland; to the power and the roar of Niagara Falls; and LBJ ranch in Texas so serene and peaceful. I have taken groups to see so many of our beautiful and important areas in the United States. I have also been fortunate to take groups into Canada. Seeing the excitement of young students going on their first field trip to senior adults traveling with a group of friends for nine days. No one can tell me that motorcoach travel does not make a difference.

I miss my groups! I have been laid off and my company’s coaches are not moving. We don’t have work. My husband is also in the business. He is a dispatcher at MCA Transportation. He was also laid off during this pandemic. This means we have no income coming in. Sadly, in the State of Florida, orange juice can only go so far, and tourism is what really fuels our state's economy. Our motorcoach industry needs assistance, we have been totally forgotten. I am not sure Washington understands that motorcoaches play an essential role in student youth travel, hurricane evacuation, hurricane relief crew transportation, senior citizen travel, military personnel transportation, and so on and so forth.

I am afraid that if these bus companies can’t pay their bills, that the banks and the lenders will soon start calling in the notes, and start sending these company in bankruptcy and furthermore out of business. What will our nation do in evacuations if the motorcoach industry is no longer viable? Has anyone in Washington D.C. thought of that? How would it look on TV if nursing homes in a path of a deadly act of nature could not get evacuated? If people die because we forgot an entire industry and then did nothing later to include them, then this would be willful negligence. We are America we can do better than this, and not allow these things to end up happening. My hope is you will speak up soon and do your best to remind your colleagues that we exist, we are essential, and we need everyone's help.

Sincerely,

Lois Turco  
Driver  
MCA Transportation  
Orlando, Florida  
407-226-2256
Dear Mr. Scott,

I starting working in the travel and tourism industry in 1980 (yes this is my 40th year). I started because as a child I did not get to travel a lot. Then my mom became a travel agent and i saw the world differently. There were places I could see in person besides in pictures in a book (remember this was before computers). I started working in a travel agency while getting my college degree from the University of Cincinnati. In Cincinnati I worked for a hotel and large tour operator. In 1988 I moved to Orlando to be closer to Mickey Mouse. I then worked for an attraction, and back to hotels. I found I loved hotel sales and worked my way up to a Regional Sales Manager with 14 properties in Florida. Then I got the opportunity to be the Business Development Manager over the sales department for a large motorcoach company. This was in 2005, I found I loved the motorcoach side of the business. It is always challenging, not always easy but a very important part of the tourism industry. I love planning the transportation for Military Reunions, school trips to Washington, D.C. and New York. Orlando is a huge convention city and our coaches play a vital part in moving the convention attendees. I have gotten on the coach to send a group of elementary school children off to a field trip. You should see the smiles! I have seen our coaches depart to evacuate people from hurricanes. We are on the DOD list and move a number of military personnel. Can you image (if you haven't seen it up close and in person) a launch out of Kennedy Space Center? Well how do you think the people get to the VIP viewing areas? By motorcoach.

Like I said: this is my 40th year in the industry, I have seen recessions, fuel price increases, political unrest, and 9/11 (which I was doing trade shows to bring people to Florida for vacation, in New York when the towers were hit). All of those things slowed our industry, but nothing has stopped us until now. Our coaches have not moved (except to have one coach do the Rolling for Awareness Rally in Washington DC) since March 16th, we do not have anything on the books until late July. We are hurting. March, April, and May are our three biggest months. They are the months we make the money to get through our slow fall. All our drivers, dispatchers, admin staff and one mechanic have been laid off. Our remaining mechanics and admin staff have had reduced hours. We have no money coming in and still have refunds to do to schools and other organizations which my owners cannot refund due to no money coming in. Do you realize we still have to pay the rent, electricity, insurance, bus payments, not to mention the money to up keep the coaches up since they still all have to be started and run to prevent mechanical issues?

We need your help. Our industry is not coming back tomorrow or the next day, in fact, it is mostly not coming back this year. Please consider voting for a bail out for the motorcoach industry.

Mimi Vielhauer CTIS, CSTP  
Sales and Marketing Specialist  
MCA Transportation  
Orlando, Florida  
407-226-2256
The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Senate  
284 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rick Scott  
United States Senate  
716 Hart Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lois Frankel  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Elected Leaders from Florida,

As a member of the Board of Directors of the American Bus Association and a member of the Florida Motorcoach Association, I am hopeful that our collective stories, being shared in partnership with the Women in Buses Council and BUSRide Magazine, will have a profound impact on your decisions to not leave the motorcoach industry out, when considering aid to this segment of the market that has been devastated by COVID-19.

My journey in the motorcoach industry began in March 1991. I left a career at one of the largest insurance companies in the country to work for one of the smallest. National Interstate Insurance, founded in 1989, was formed to specifically offer insurance programs to motorcoach operators in the United States. Since that time, I have never looked back and consider myself part of the Motorcoach industry family. As you may know, the industry is made up of almost 3,000 companies – many small, family owned businesses. The impact on these companies, their families and their employees has been devastating. From the owners, many who are hands-on, working long hours in the business, to their employees including drivers, mechanics, dispatchers and bus cleaners, their families are suffering due to lack of work and lack of travel across the country.

How this industry differs from others is the amount of capital required to finance the coaches that transport the public. At a price tag in the $500,000 range per coach, the amount is significant. With the covid-19 pandemic completely bringing travel to a halt, these families have had no income to offset the cost to maintain the equipment and to afford the payments on this equipment. Further, they have had to let their employees go as they can’t afford to keep them on the payroll.

While the re-opening of states and economies is going to be key to the survival of these small family owned businesses, the industry really needs the support in the form of loans and grants to have any hope of making it through this time. As fellow Floridians, you understand the impact of hurricane season and the importance of the motorcoach industry being there in the case of evacuations. Also, as Floridians, you understand the impact on travel and tourism on our state. Without the motorcoach operators bringing people to our great state, tourism has been significantly impacted. Just in case you aren’t aware, I’ve attached the Economic Impact study showing the affects the Motorcoach industry has on the state. I hope you consider our motorcoach family and the devastating impact the pandemic has had on them and to the state of Florida.

I sincerely thank you for your time and wish you and your family good health and safety!

Sincerely,

Michelle A. Wiltgen  
AVP, National Marketing Manager  
National Interstate Insurance Company  
Lake Worth, Florida  
440-821-1961
The Honorable Bill Posey  
2150 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  

Dear Bill Posey,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Lori Weaver I am an insurance agent in Florida. I would like to share how this pandemic has affected me and an industry very close to my heart. My primary book of business is motorcoach companies all over the United States and 99% of their units are parked. We are suffering greatly due to the fact they were overlooked when funding was provided to the airline industry and transit operations.

Several of my motorcoach companies had to go out of business unable to pay their bus notes and maintain minimal insurance premiums. It is very upsetting to witness successful companies that started from nothing and the companies that have been operating from generation to generation to not be able to keep their businesses going. The companies that are not yet out of business are barely surviving with fear of unforeseen fate of what is inevitable to come without receipt of funds.

They are facing crucial financial hardship and need immediate assistance. For each and every one of these private motorcoach companies who have been there for America time and time again. We cannot let this go on, they are a vital necessity in our country.

This industry is made up of an amazing group of men and women that should no longer endure loss during this pandemic. A voice to be heard with hopes and prayers that our congress will come through for our suffering U.S motorcoach industry.

Sincerely,

Lori Weaver  
Sales Executive  
RRL Insurance Agency  
Melbourne, Florida  
321-421-6309
Dear Senators Mazie Hirono & Brian Schatz,

I want to share my story of how the visitor industry shutdown has impacted me but more importantly my team and colleagues as well as friendly competitors. We have had to lay off 350 team members at Polynesian Adventure Tours due to COVID-19 and the shutdown of the nation. During this time, I have been fortunate to remain employed however I did have to take a 20 percent wage cut. The 27 employees that remain have all taken this wage cut and of course had to make financial plans to sustain during this pandemic. Hundreds of motorcoach companies as well as small coaches, limousines and vans have all had to close their door. Some of them may never return as this pandemic drained their life savings and many had hoped we would have bounced back sooner rather than later. It will take all of us years to recover the losses that we endured.

As a professional woman who loves our visitor industry and a citizen, I would like to see Government assist with relief to Motor Coach companies just like they have with other entities. My employees, my family members and friends have all had to stand in food bank lines, wait months for unemployment checks, not to mention be denied then appeal only to receive it, which should have happened early on, defer loans, defer rent, all of which will catch up to them. Our team is now without jobs and honestly due to COVID-19, tourism will not be the same for years so some of the employees will not be coming back to work for us. Those of us left will also be doing double workload to save the company that we love. We were so pleased that we participated in the D.C. Rolling bus rally as we had a bus in California that could not be shipped due to COVID-19. It made us very proud because who would have thought that a Hawaii bus would be on the streets in front of the Nation's Capital? However, as proud as we are, and we met many colleagues in the mainland we still have not received any relief. Our friendly competitors are in dire need as well here in the State on all Islands.

I have worked in the Visitor’s Industry in Hawaii for 37 years and I love it. I love our land, our people and all that we have to offer. I love our place and want to share it responsibly with visitors and family. In my job I have developed tours, private charters, coordinated transportation for large conventions and so I share a lot of my work experiences with my family. Example, earlier this month I reached out to family and friends to visit Iolani Palace. Told them the Palace needs funds or she will have to shut her doors. Explained that this is a Palace for visitors and residents to visit. Now I have been there many times due to my role, but my family and friends have not. So, on July 11th I have 23 people visiting the Palace to learn about our place! How cool is that! It is my responsibility to share these places with family, residents but also with visitor’s. We have so much to offer the world. Haleakala, Volcanoes, Pali, Waimea Canyon and yes other cultural things like Polynesian Cultural Center, Luau’s, concerts, marathons, etc. All of which requires transportation. Just like getting visitors here requires planes or ships, they need a ride to visit and patron our places and to boost our economy. So many people depend on visitors both residents and out of state.

I tell you all of this because we need you and Congress to help us to sustain, to give jobs to local residents, to take visitor’s responsibly to visit all of our beautiful places, to enjoy what we love here in Hawai’i. Helping us would give so many people jobs. Hotels, restaurants, food service, farm owners, boat operators, hikers, etc.

Many thanks for all that you do, we look forward to some type of help from the Senate.

Sincerely,

Jamie Barut
Vice President Operations
Polynesian Adventure
Honolulu, Hawaii
808-457-4312
Dear Senators Ernst and Grassley, and Representative Loebsack,

My name is Nicole Fritz and I serve as the executive assistant for the president, executive vice president, and general manager of Burlington Trailways. I began my career with Burlington Trailways as a customer service representative in our tour office; I am fortunate that my evolving job duties have allowed me to experience all facets of the motorcoach business from booking tour reservations to being a guest at board meetings for national associations. The effects of COVID-19 are now threatening an industry I have come to love.

I graduated with a degree in both politics and law, politics, and society. I didn't want to travel far from home after graduation; I decided to take a year to see what was available and determine where I wanted to end up geographically. I accepted an entry-level position as a way to make ends meet. As many in the industry can attest, a job in tourism isn't just a job – it becomes a passion. Even personal time and vacations become work-related as you experience new and exciting things that you want to research more and share via a public tour.

After four years in our tour office, I transferred to the corporate office to focus on the administration of the company's federal grants. As is the general nature of a small business, I started to learn a little bit of multiple roles throughout the company. I learned quickly that the job I took to pay the bills was actually a job that fell well within my formal areas of study. Through 5311(f) grant administration I have researched drug and alcohol, ADA, Title VI, and safety program compliance. In partnership with the American Bus Association, I have learned of the federal rule change process, how to submit official industry comments, and how to implement government rule changes within the company. Examining these various laws made me realize that the bus industry is rarely considered during the creation of the very policies that govern it.

Similarly, COVID-19 has highlighted the disregard still shown towards the motorcoach industry. The week of March 9, 2020, our charter department started receiving cancellation notices from our customers. By March 13, 2020, our charter work for the remainder of March, April, May, and June was gone. Zero. That same week, our scheduled route passenger counts dropped below 30 percent of our average. In five days, we went from a projected record-breaking summer to almost nothing. With a national emergency declared, we began calling our governor's office. All information we had said that a 14-day quarantine was recommended, and social distancing was a necessity – we didn't know if we were supposed to be running our scheduled routes. We received generic correspondence, but we never received an answer. It seems that no one thought to include the motorcoach industry in emergency planning.

Now, as we continue to operate with a skeleton crew and have half of our fleet parked and stripped of license plates and insurance, we are fighting for recognition. We are constantly having to explain what exact function we serve in society. Please understand that we love advocating for motorcoaches and have no problem explaining the many important functions we serve, but it is very frustrating to watch as every other mode of transportation is handed billions of dollars in bailouts while we sit at square one trying to prove that a 92 year old industry serves a pivotal role in society. While every other mode of transportation received significant resources in the first relief package, we are told that we have to wait until after July 4th for a discussion to begin about saving our industry.

To be frank, I may not have a job by the time Congress ends discussions. Every person actively working for Burlington Trailways is responsible for more than their share of tasks right now. This is not a sustainable environment. To work hard every single day to make sure we are still following the endless government regulations that apply to the few coaches we are still running, only to go home and wonder if we'll have jobs next week is emotionally draining. We aren't sleeping, we're cranky, but we still show up every day hoping this is the day things change. Our passengers need us to show up every day, and we will as long as we can.

The motorcoach industry doesn't want special recognition, we want equal recognition. If Congress continues to bail out Amtrak, the airlines, the cruiselines, etc. there is no reason the motorcoach industry should be ignored. Acknowledgement by Congress through financial aid will show that our industry does matter and deserves to be saved. Amtrak, airlines, and the motorcoach industry are interdependent; we help each other to move passengers. Please help the motorcoach industry so that we can continue our important role in the transportation chain of America.

Sincerely,

Nicole Fritz
Executive Assistant
Burlington Trailways
West Burlington, Iowa
319-753-2864 x164
Dear Elected Leaders from Iowa,

I am the past chair for the Women in Buses Council. The Women in Buses Council is housed within the American Bus Association. We have partnered with BUSRide Magazine to tell the story of women in this industry and the impact COVID-19 has had on our livelihood.

I appreciate the time you have given John and me as we have worked to pave our runway for future success. For the purpose of this letter, I will tell you more about my journey as a motorcoach operator.

If you recall from my Horton Hears a Who letters, I met and married a man with a motorcoach company. After commuting 70 miles one way to teach for 2 years, John called me (he was on the road) and asked if I would come and work with him. I had just signed my contract with the Clarion-Goldfield CSD. I called my friend who, after having triplets, left teaching to work with her husband. Her advice was that it could be trying to work with your husband, but it was worth the change. John had promised me half days and working from home. Hmmmmm. Well, half days are less than 12 hours, and being a 24/7/365 business, you end up working from home often. LOL.

Do I regret my change? NO. In my eight years working with John I have grown as a leader. When I taught, I was perfectly content staying within the four walls of my classroom. I did “lead” when I had student teachers, but that is as far as I extended myself. In this industry I have built a resume that makes my head spin. I served on the Motorcoach Marketing Council, was membership chair before becoming chair of Women in Buses. I was the marketplace chair for the American Bus Association's annual convention in Louisville 2019. This led to my position on the American Bus Association Board of Directors. I am the treasurer for the Iowa Group Travel Association. And, because of contacts in this industry, I joined the FIRE Foundation of Northeast Iowa board of directors (a non-profit advocating for full inclusion in religious education) and will be installed as a board member of Iowans for Life this July.

In January 2020, I was honored to be the Women in Buses award recipient at ABA’s marketplace in Omaha. To be recognized among my peers, many that were mentors for me as I got my feet wet, was humbling.

Since then, it has been a whirlwind of unimaginable proportions. It has been surreal. I was to be riding a high and enjoying record breaking successes in revenue. Since I took over the direction of our sales department, we had seen a 40% growth. All of that has come to a crashing halt. Actually, it has reversed at speeds unknown. Typically we have a handful of cancelations a year. As of now, our cancelations total $1.5 million. Our few bookings are for the military and their schedule keeps changing, so that isn’t even the guarantee we could once count as solid. Our payroll is now almost non-existent.

• I miss traveling for industry meetings
• I miss collaborating with other operators from across the nation in person
• I miss the phone ringing
• I miss positive record breaking sales
• I miss my clients
• I miss tracking my buses
• I miss my employees

I look forward to the following:
• Traveling for industry meetings
• Hugging my friends as we meet to discuss best practices
• The phone ringing so often, we use all 3 of our lines
• Emails flooding my inbox (notice I don’t miss emails, but I do look forward to them overwhelming me again)
• Blowing past revenue records out of the water
• Meeting/talking/engaging with my clients regularly
• Missing my employees because they are ON THE ROAD with my clients
• Tracking my buses at all hours of the day

When Congress helps us survive, our runway can be built, and we will SOAR once again. We do need your help to make this happen. John and I will continue our conversations with you as we navigate these roads.

Thank you, again, for your time.

Kim Grzywacz, CTIS
Sales Director
CIT Signature Transportation
Ames, Iowa
515-233-0286
Dear Elected Leaders from Maryland,

I am a member of the motorcoach family by birth (my father, uncle, and grandfather started a company in the 1980s), by choice, and by marriage! The Women in Buses Council is housed within the American Bus Association. We have partnered with BUSRide Magazine to tell the story of women in this industry and the impact COVID-19 has had on our livelihood.

The motorcoach industry is family. My sister now runs what our father, uncle and grandfather started. I have, through the years, been involved in the accounting of that company, the bus company H & L Charter Co., Inc. In fact, my parents earned their living at that company and that allowed them to help send my sisters and myself to college. Because of that, my sisters and I were the first generation of our family to go to college directly after high school. In college, I studied accounting. My first paid job at the motorcoach company was as an accountant!

The company gave me the opportunity to put my schooling into practical use and learn not only the debits and credits, but how the accounting records could be used for business management instead of only compliance based reporting (tax returns etc.). Without this experience in a business that was so integral to our family’s ability to earn a living, I would not have gained the perspective that I now use to help motorcoach companies across the nation.

Currently, I own and operate a CPA firm specializing in the motorcoach industry. I am located on Maryland’s eastern shore in Deal Island, Somerset County. I help motorcoach companies make sure their accounting works for them, providing them the information to make business decisions based on financial results. The company belongs to the United Motorcoach Association, Maryland Motorcoach Association, and Pennsylvania Bus Association. Normally, I am attending those association meetings, visiting clients and potential clients. I am also learning about the travel industry which motorcoach companies support by bringing in passengers.

Many of my clients have limited my services to only the most critical ones. Most of my clients are focusing on the services that will help them survive this – tax return preparation and accounting services needed to provide proper documentation to their lenders as they request deferrals on their largest single cash outflow – debt payments. Since almost all motorcoach companies’ business and revenues came to a screeching halt mid-March, they do not have the funds to pay for accounting services that go beyond compliance reporting. As a result, I expect my company’s earnings to be down 50% due to COVID-19. Perhaps even into 2021 as the industry is expected to make a slow recovery.

My husband is currently a group facilitator with Spader Business Management, a company that forms groups to help motorcoach companies improve their business through best practices and the sharing of ideas and financial information. Before that, he owned a motorcoach company in Arizona. He, my sister, and my mom were and still are “bus buddies”. He and I met through them. In our home, as in my mom and dad’s home, conversation is frequently about buses. Although these days we listen to our clients, make observations, and do what we can to help them through this time. His normal travel schedule to facilitate group meetings have been cancelled. His expected earnings have decreased by at least 50% this year.

Most of my life has been spent being a part of the motorcoach family. This pandemic is sure to take some members of the family down. Congress has the power to be proactive in reducing that number.

Respectfully yours in numbers,

Tracy Fickett, CPA
BusBooks
Deal Island, Maryland
602-218-8880

To the Honorable Andrew Harris
2334 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515
Dear Honorable Legislator,

Without a doubt, we can all agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the U.S. economy and every American citizen. Many industries have been crippled and the motorcoach industry is no exception. We are in dire need of your help for our industry to survive and to get the wheels on our buses rolling again.

Our company's story began back in 1968, over 52 years ago, when my grandparents, Paul & Anna Rill, bought their first yellow school bus. Growing over the years, we now operate 38 school buses and 5 motorcoaches, employing 50+ well-qualified, dedicated people in our rural community located in Westminster, Maryland. We proudly have four generations of the Rill family actively involved in the business. My personal journey on Rill's buses began as a young child riding on a yellow school bus as my mom drove kids to school. When our company purchased its first motorcoach in 1984, my travel experiences really began as my parents and younger sisters accompanied groups as we traveled all over the United States and into Eastern Canada. My love for travel and bringing people together started at an early age and has increased tremendously over the years, eventually leading me to become employed with the company for over 23 years now. Over the past few months, I have been unable to give my customers the experiences they look forward to and the services that are essential to them, which is heart-wrenching to me. Many motorcoach companies are comprised of small, family-owned businesses like ours who may not see the next generation have the opportunity to take the reins.

Rill's Bus Service is a private passenger carrier which operates both retail and charter tours within the U.S. and Canada, as well as transporting children to school on daily routes, field trips, & sports trips. In addition to schools and colleges, we provide transportation for senior centers, churches, community organizations/groups, summer camps, weddings & special events, airport & cruise terminal shuttles, and much more. Our previous sold-out status for our busy spring season came to a halt in mid-March and all business through the end of June and most of the summer has been cancelled as a direct result of the pandemic. With minimal business coming in due to the unforeseen future, it seems like the long journey will continue until we reach the light at the end of the tunnel. Groups are not looking to reschedule or book new business since many of the destinations they travel to are either still closed or not accepting groups at this time. That being said, our employees continue to be out of work at this time with the exception of essential office personnel, which may eventually result in layoffs as well. With the pressure of vehicle loan payments, insurance and healthcare premiums, and all other monthly obligations, we are tremendously suffering as a small business to stay in operation and continuity of service to our community and beyond.

Our 43 buses have been sitting still since March 13th. It is still unknown, even as a lot of our country is re-opening, when we will be able to get back on the road again. With restrictions still in place regarding group capacities, guidelines, and the inability of most schools and social organizations to congregate and organize their trips, it creates a domino effect to the entire travel industry. Tourist attractions, restaurants, hotels, sightseeing cruises, receptive operators and so many more partners in the travel industry, rely on us to bring groups to their locations and help to stimulate the U.S. economy through travel & tourism. We are so grateful for the PPP/EIDL/SBA loans that some of us were able to obtain, however, the amounts granted were only enough to keep us afloat for a few short weeks and our employees are now on unemployment. Support and calls to action from the American Bus Association and United Motorcoach Association along with countless letters to our legislators pleading on behalf of our industry have shown our desperation during this unprecedented time. Safety is always our top priority, so we understand certain group and other restrictions currently implemented, but we need help from you to get through financially until our buses have drivers sitting behind the wheels and our seats are filled with passengers. Sadly, our industry will be one of the last to reopen with no destination in sight, as most of America begins the road to recovery.

We want to be there when schools need us to transport children to school daily and for extracurricular activities. We want to help individuals from our community get to places and see sights that they have dreamed of visiting. We want to be there when a soon-to-be married couple seeks transportation for their guests to their big day. We want to be there when churches, senior centers, and community organizations call upon us to take them for social activities, sightseeing, and retreats. We want to continue being there for our employees and many passengers who rely on us to get them there. None of this will be possible without your help now. This is not only our industry's future, but it is my family's future, it is my future. Please provide relief to our industry so that we can continue carrying our precious cargo that depends on us to safely get them where they are going and to continue my grandparents’ legacy for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Lauren H. Grote, CTIS
Tour Planner
Rill’s Bus Service
Westminster, Maryland
410-876-7530 ext.103
Dear Representative Kennedy,

I work for Bloom’s Bus Lines in Taunton, Massachusetts. We operate 28 motorcoaches along the east coast and into Canada and over 200 school buses. Our company is 3rd generation family owned and has been operating for 74 years. I started in the industry at the age of 25 as an assistant controller for our two companies, H&L Bloom, (school bus division) & Bloom’s Bus Lines (motorcoach division). Over the past 13 years, I have gained confidence through learning all aspects of the business. My roles have expanded to director of Finance and Accounting as well as head of our Customer Service, Marketing and Tour Division. I am proud to be a woman in this male-dominated industry and also be able to say that my customer service and accounting team is all women.

Our lives all changed forever on March 13, 2020. This day marked our last day of transportation and the day we had to lay off most of our staff. COVID-19 has been devastating to our business and the entire motorcoach industry. What was anticipated as our best year has turned into our worst. We have not seen the light at the end of the tunnel. Our recovery is going to be extensive.

The motorcoach industry has become a part of who I am. I love being a part of a business that brings people together. Our buses move students, families, tourists and corporate travelers. We travel to destinations that otherwise people would not have the opportunity to go to. We are a vital part of America.

I started our tour division over 10 years ago. Our tours support local businesses and we bring revenue to all the towns and cities that we visit. Our customers love the friendships they make and sense of community that they feel while traveling with us. In a normal year, we operate over 200 tours. It is heartbreaking to not be able to provide that much needed service this year.

During this pandemic, I have spoken with many of our customers. One story has forever left a mark on me. This past November, I had taken a group of our customers on a thank you trip to Atlantic City. One of my customers celebrated her 97th birthday on this trip. I led the entire bus in singing Happy Birthday to her. A friend of hers called me recently to let me know she passed away from complications of COVID-19. While she was sick, she reminisced about this last great trip and how special it was to her. I am part of her story and she is now part of mine. I made a difference. Our industry makes a difference and needs help in order to survive.

Sincerely,

Erin Ducharme
Director of Finance, Accounting, Marketing & Tours
Bloom’s Bus Lines
Taunton, Massachusetts
774-226-1024
Dear Senator Stabenow,

These past few months have been a real struggle for so many businesses and I just wanted to give you a little background information about mine.

I am the president of Great Lakes Motorcoach, Inc., my company has been in the Grand Rapids, MI area for 36 years, running group charter buses. My love for the industry began as a child when my Dad was in the motorcoach transportation business, he owned several small companies until merging all of them together, forming Michigan Trailways. I would answer the phone at home if my Mom was busy with my smaller siblings and as I got a little older, I started working after school in his office. At sixteen I drove small vehicles taking migrant workers children to day care in the summer and at age 25 I learned how to drive a charter bus. My first charter trip was to take my entire family, including Dad, Brothers & Uncles (all in the business) on a two hour ride to dinner while all the men watched to make sure I did not spill one drop of water from the full glass that sat in the dash, if I could do that I was in! Needless to say, I did it, so I started driving short charters and working in the office. My first cross country trip was from California back to Michigan when I was 28, driving for Michigan Trailways. After getting married and moving to Grand Rapids in the early 80’s, with Dad’s blessing my Husband and I bought our first two buses and decided to go out on our own. Throughout the years our fleet grew, and we currently operate 16 charter buses.

This Coronavirus has been devastating to our company, we had every trip on the books cancel from March 15 through July so far this year and we are unsure when things will pick up again. Our customers that paid deposits or full payments for their trips expect their money back. Some refunds have been sent back but with the total being over $300,000.00 it may be quite some time before everyone will get their money. Our busiest time of the year is normally March through July and due to the Coronavirus, we have lost close to $500,000.00 in revenue. We had to lay off all our office staff, drivers and maintenance personnel. I think the biggest reason I cry myself to sleep at night is because we have all worked so long and so hard and just don't want to see it end this way, either to our business or any of the other small family operated motorcoach companies.

Although we are grateful for the Payroll Protection Plan that helped for a while, it only took the edge off our payroll for a short time. Employees had to reapply for unemployment because once the PPP ran out there was still no work and due to social distancing, the charter & tour bus industry is going to take some time to start up again. It is my opinion the motorcoach industry has been overlooked entirely during this pandemic. There are 3,000 motorcoach companies in the USA, providing 600 million passenger trips annually and most are small family owned like mine. We could all use help from Congress to get our employees back to work and business going again.

Thank you for your time and if you ever come back to Grand Rapids, we would love to have you on one of our coaches again!

Sincerely,

Julie Reisig
President
Great Lakes Motorcoach, Inc.
Grand Rapids, Michigan
616-791-8831
Dear Senators Smith and Klobuchar, and Representative Hagedorn,

I have had the good fortune to work in the private motorcoach industry for over 21 years. During that time, I have seen a number of events that have impacted the industry ranging from the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the outbreak of SARS and our national recession. While all of these very unfortunate events had a dramatic impact on our industry, none of them have impacted us as swiftly and severely as the current COVID-19 pandemic. I work for ABC Companies, which is a family owned and privately held motorcoach distributor, selling new and pre-owned coaches, in addition to providing, parts, service and finance programs for the US Motorcoach market. We have locations throughout the US and in your state, which support an industry of 3,000 motorcoach operators with over 36,000 buses moving Americans throughout the country, connecting public transportation, airlines, cruise ships and more. These businesses make up our customer base, most of which are also family owned and operated. Because they are not part of the public transportation sector, and not associated with the airlines or Amtrak, they did not receive any directed relief funds, putting the entire industry at risk. As an industry that connects people, places and other modes of transportation, we are easily overlooked, although our services are critical to our country. Private motorcoaches are used to evacuate entire communities when disaster strikes. They are also used to move more of our soldiers domestically than any other form of transportation. They move seniors and students and offer affordable travel options to those who do not have access to public transportation. All the while, we dramatically reduce the national carbon footprint removing on average 36 cars for every motorcoach on the road. We also take great pride in being the safest over the road transportation in our country.

Unfortunately, this humble industry literally came to an immediate halt the moment social distancing and stay at home orders went into effect. Our vehicles have been parked and over 80% of our 100,000 employees were laid off. As we are not an industry that relies on handouts, our creativity and passion for serving the traveling public has always prevailed. However, when government orders were put into place, we have watched our business cease. Although the SBA loan assistance programs have been helpful for those who have been able to access funds, the bulk of our business expenses are vehicle purchase and maintenance, followed by ever rising insurance costs. We are a capital-intensive industry because of the equipment we must use to serve the traveling public. Because of this, our industry associations have asked Congress for $15 Billion in directed funds to help our businesses remain solvent while waiting for America to reopen. As a distributor to this industry, we have suffered alongside our customers. Sales have practically diminished as so few buses are moving. This trickles across all of our businesses as they are designed to assist this highly fragmented industry. While ABC Companies has not requested specific funds, we need assistance for our customers or the industry is at risk of failing and leaving so many Americans, visitors, students, seniors, soldiers and more without a way to get to their destination.

We believe it will take $15 Billion of dedicated funds to ensure our industry survives given current projections. Therefore, I am asking if I can count on you and your staff to support our industry and represent our needs during the many government relief funding discussions and ultimately legislation development.

I would be happy to share more information and discuss how you and your staff can assist this industry.

Attached is a link to a video we produced when the stay at home orders first began: https://youtu.be/o3ty_jKz65o

Even after multiple relief packages, the message remains as we ask that you not miss our bus.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brenda Borwege
Senior Vice President of Midwest-Southwest Region
ABC Companies
Faribault, Minnesota
507-334-1871 ext 30141
Dear Betty McCollum and Amy Klobuchar,

My name is Amanda Hermann, a three-and-a-half year employee at Jefferson Lines Bus Company. I ended up at Jefferson Lines by fluke. I was eager to leave my Fortune 500 role for anything that felt more personable with values that aligned with my own. I found Jefferson and ultimately fell in love with buses, serving the community in a really practical way of transportation, and creating an innovative experience for passengers.

Last year, Jefferson celebrated its 100th year of business. Along with celebrating a century of transportation within Minnesota and the world around us, we celebrated tremendous business and passenger growth. It was truly an amazing year for Jefferson that was quickly suppressed on March 6, 2020.

I can still remember the gut-wrenching feeling of wondering if I would still have a job while sitting in a conference room discussing who would be let go from the company. Everything we had worked so hard for seemed all for not. In a matter of days, passenger count dropped dramatically, employees were laid off, and every dollar to the Jefferson name became crucial to operations. To add to our struggle, finding supplies to keep our front-line employees safe was exhausting, both in efforts and finances.

With each stimulus package we were hopeful relief would come for the motor coach industry, but with each package we were forgotten. It was disappointing and frustrating. A crucial piece to the national transportation system was and continues to be forgotten.

The most devastating piece as a proud employee and supporter of the motor coach industry in general is seeing the financial toll it takes simply to keep our front-line employees safe. With so many supplies in high demand and nearly impossible to obtain, our small team uses things like empty travel Downy bottles, bubble containers, and recycled marketing supplies to help provide our drivers with basic safety supplies like hand sanitizer. I now know a single Purell hand sanitizer dispenser refill will supply 10 Downy travel bottles for our drivers. We have 80 drivers. One refill is $50.66.

When masks were impossible to find, our marketing and IT teams sewed over 80 masks from their living rooms. Now, we finally have 3-ply masks for employees after 60+ days of searching. However, we face an industry-wide pressure to provide them for passengers. Where our partners can afford to pay for 800,000 masks, Jefferson is able to purchase 14,000. We have had masks for 20 days. We have 9,000 left. To order the same amount will be over $10,000.

Major interline transportation companies within the US have been serving passengers and our country for over 100 years. We are resourceful, assiduous, and innovative by nature. We have survived the Great Depression, World War I and II, oil crisis, the recession, and more. We are now asking our government to serve us, the motor coach industry, by helping us survive this exceedingly unique climate with the same support provided to all other national transportation industries.

Thank you,

Amanda Hermann
Brand & Customer Care Manager
Jefferson Lines
Minneapolis, Minnesota
612-359-3400
Dear Senator Blunt,

A little over 37 years ago I was laid off from my first “real” job as a payroll clerk for a factory. After six months of hunting for another job, I landed an interview at Mid-American Coaches for the position of receptionist. Amazingly, I received a phone call a couple weeks later offering me the job on a trial basis -- after 3 months either I or the company could say “this isn’t working”. You see, I had very little work experience and almost no travel background so I wasn’t really a strong candidate for a job in the travel industry. I gratefully took the job and started to learn the terminology of the travel industry, about driver logs and DOT qualification files, how to read a map, etc. After about 6 weeks Mr. Jones asked how I liked the business and said the job was mine if I wanted it. I was thrilled as I discovered I not only liked the company but loved meeting customers and helping them with their vacation plans! Over the years I have worked in computer entry, cross trained in tour reservations, worked as a Tour Director, and for the last 30 years in charter sales. I have greatly enjoyed all these different positions but really enjoy the customer service part of my job -- getting to share in the excitement of planning and then the happy reports of how much fun the group had makes my job feel like a hobby rather than “work”.

Now I’m in my late 50’s and find it quite possible that I will be losing my career. I financially can’t afford to retire but finding another job in travel won’t be possible in my area. One of our competitors has already closed (after 35 years in business) and others are greatly struggling to keep their doors open. Therefore, I’m asking for your help! Please help the motor coach industry with some financial aid to save our industry.

Mid-American Coaches has been in business since 1927 -- since 1957 under the same family ownership. We’ve had some hard times but nothing like the COVID crisis. At the beginning of March our bus bookings had really picked up after the usual winter slow down. We had many days when we were scheduled to have 15-16 coaches (almost the entire fleet) running and things were looking very promising for a great spring. Then March 11 the phone calls all turned to cancellations for that week, the next, and for later in Spring. Schools were closing so all field trips were called off, the college and high school sports games were called off, the theaters, museums and restaurants closed so the senior groups had to cancel. “Shelter in place” took effect and we went from almost sold out to nothing in a matter of days. We have had hardly any coaches running since which means no income for the last 3 months but the bills are still there -- licenses, state permits, insurance, phones, bus payments, etc.

Unlike the restaurants that can offer curbside service or other businesses that reopening means getting sanitizers/plexi shields and unlocking the doors, for our industry it will mean months with little income. Trips are not something planned and sold in just a few days. The group organizer needs time to plan and get enough people interested in going. Right now, so many places are still closed to groups that leaders and tour operators can’t even plan trips so there isn’t any need for coaches. But that need will return when COVID has been tamed with a vaccine! However, without some financial help for the industry, the customers will return to find very few motorcoach companies still in business. This means very little competition which is what keeps standards up and rates reasonable in any industry. The schools, church groups, social clubs, and even the US military and government will be paying more for their transportation or maybe not be able to find available coaches at all. When a hurricane is headed toward the coast and FEMA wants to evacuate, the last thing anyone will want to hear is that there are no longer enough bus companies nearby to help with evacuations.

Thank you for your attention and any help you can provide the motor coach industry to survive this crisis.

Sincerely,

Rita Reuber
Charter Representative
Mid-American Coaches, Inc.
Washington, Missouri
636-432-7862
Dear Missouri Congressional Delegation –

My time in the bus industry started in December of 2017 at Cavallo Bus Lines, in Springfield, MO. I was 26 putting me a young pup in the bus world. I was coming out of management for Loves Travel Stops and remember someone in Diesel School told me “Kid, if you get bus experience, everyone is going to want you.”

I made up my mind that I was tired of tires and evening services, I wanted to learn something more. I was lucky enough that a gentleman by the name of Andy Waughtal gave me my opportunity. To this day, Andy and I still talk.

I started out as a pre-trip technician and I was lucky enough to even get a motorcoach DVD player to work for me. Part of my employment package was to gain a CDL with Cavallo. By April of 2018, I had passed my CDL and was now road-testing units.

Mr. Waughtal had left Cavallo and Grant Gelert had just left Grey Hound coming to Cavallo Bus Lines. Mr. Gelert took me under his wing and right away I became a project to him. I was soon on my way to MCI in Louisville, KY for HVAC training.

During during my time at MCI, I had made friends with a fellow mechanic Josh Govoni from Boston, MA. Fast forwarding to August 2018, the news broke that Cavallo Bus Lines was no longer in business and the same day I lost my job. My phone was immediately ringing with a new opportunity. Andy and I talked like we were still coworkers. He said, “go on kid, tell me what you need.” I had explained my career was just starting to take off as a motorcoach tech and was not ready to be done. I discussed my options and he shared what he would doing if he was in my shoes.

The following Monday I traveled from Springfield, MO to Wichita, KS for a face to face interview with Village Tours. I toured the facility and accepted an incredible offer back home in Springfield, Missouri. I learned that if you had a CDL you are worth more than gold itself. Between fixing coaches and driving tours, I had a full-time career. The week before my wedding, I traveled for 9 days to complete a military move and returned just in time for my wedding.

I have met some of the best people in the motorcoach world and heard some of the most incredible stories on long trips with fellow drivers. I have even found myself in full driver uniform while fixing a motorcoach, all to take care of the passengers.

Even working on another company's coach to get them rolling again, I learned so much about myself and others, that have the same passion and drive like I did working on motor coaches.

As of today, I have come off the road after a short period in the Oil Fields of North Dakota, coming home to settle into a break down coordinator position with a local trucking company. I hope to return to the motorcoach world once again following the extreme toll the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on the industry. My heart breaks for every single motorcoach company and they are certainly deserving of all the help they can get. I believe most people do not fully understand how buses do in fact move America. From military, church groups, to ball teams - my greatest memories come from driving motorcoaches, meeting all the people, being 27 year old female and pulling up in a MCI J4500. As a driver, you have huge smile on your face filled with satisfaction for your career as you kneel the bus and continue helping passengers aboard. A driver like me always gets “Hey, are you even 16?”

“No Sir, in fact I am the Mechanic who just did a full service and detail job for your trip today.”

I have had the pleasure of visiting an incredible amount of states, sights all while getting paid to do it. My advice to the younger generation is to look at the motorcoach world while you are young, single and free to travel. You will get paid to do something you love!

Brandi Young
Former Mechanic
Village Tours
Springfield, Missouri
417-737-2267
Dear Senator Fischer,

I am writing to you today, to share my story of how the Coronavirus has impacted me and the company I work for.

I am the Human Resources Director for a company that I love working for. I am one of the fortunate few that sincerely enjoy going to work each day and have the opportunity to work with a great team of professionals who truly care about one another and want to help the company succeed. I work for Arrow Stage Lines.

Arrow Stage Lines has a rich history of being one of the best and safest motorcoach companies in the business, and that has much to do with the family that owns it. The Busskohl family started this business in 1928, and has continued that tradition through today. The Busskohl family cares about their employees, who in turn, take great pride in their work, and the result of that, is passed along to our customers, by providing amazing travel and transportation experiences, while helping them to make memories that will last a lifetime.

I have enjoyed working with the amazing people at Arrow Stage Lines for a little over five years now. We have locations in 12 cities, in seven states. Prior to March of this year, we employed well over 600 people. Those 600+ employees were motorcoach operators, mechanics, safety and training coordinators, dispatchers, sales staff, motorcoach detailers, accountants, administrative staff and operations staff. Each and every one of our team members have an important role to fill in making our company one of the best in the business. Each of those 600 team members are like family.

Today, we might have 35 team members working on a “good” day. We have had to furlough, lay off, and eliminate approximately 99% of our positions. The few that are still working, have had significant pay cuts, but have taken on additional responsibilities. These are people whose lives changed drastically, practically overnight. These are members of our “family”. There was no time to prepare, there were no arrangements that could be made, there were no warning signs our lives would be turned upside down in just a few days’ time.

March 16, 2020 is a day that I will not soon forget. That is the day our business shut down. We had motorcoaches across the country that were being sent home mid-trip, due to the country shutting down around them. Tour operators were calling and cancelling future charters. Sports teams were cancelling, entertainers were cancelling, schools and churches were cancelling, businesses were cancelling. Every charter we had booked was cancelling, with no idea when they would be ready to travel again. None of us could have imagined that six months later, we would still be waiting for the day customers would be ready and eager to travel again.

This coronavirus has been detrimental to our business and the lives of so many. With no revenue, it’s difficult to know how much longer we can keep the business afloat. We have had to restructure the business, eliminate positions, and temporarily close offices, to continue operating. As drastic as these measures are, it is not enough to sustain our company a great deal longer. There are still motorcoach payments to make, insurance premiums to pay, operating expenses incurred, and payroll to be made for the few still working. The uncertainty of not knowing if there will be a business to go back to is starting to weigh heavily on many of us.

Every day we hear from our motorcoach operators who want to know when they can get back to doing what they love; helping their customers have the best travel experience they can. That’s what our business is, that is what we do; help to make memories and get our passengers where they need to be in a safe and timely manner.

The motorcoach industry is instrumental to the travel and tourism industry. However, the reality is that many motorcoach companies may not be around when our passengers feel safe to travel again. Without some type of federal financial assistance, few motorcoach companies will be able to survive the effects of the Coronavirus. One of the primary modes of transportation will be severely limited. The motorcoach industry is not made up of huge corporations, it is comprised of many smaller family owned businesses; the backbone of our country. Without assistance, the motorcoach industry could be eliminated. All of those that love taking care of the customers will no longer have the opportunity to do what they enjoy most. Their livelihoods and the ability to support their families, rely on the motorcoach industry; just as millions of passengers rely on the motorcoach industry to get where they need to go. This is an industry that we need to do what we can to foster and maintain, before it is too late.

I would genuinely appreciate your consideration in this matter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Chelle Cooper
Human Resources Director
Arrow Stage Lines
Omaha, Nebraska
402-731-1900

The Honorable Deb Fischer
U.S. Senate
454 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510
The Honorable Senator Jeanne Shaheen  
506 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen,

The Coronavirus pandemic has hit so many businesses across the US in ways that most of us could never have imagined. I want to thank you for your role in ensuring that New England Coach has a fighting chance of survival. You have shown your commitment to helping small businesses as one of the four lead bipartisan negotiators in the CARES Act. We are lucky to have you fighting for us. The bipartisan letter that you and your colleagues sent to the Senate Leadership requesting that the next COVID-19 response package include the motorcoach industry shows your concern for our industry's existence. My industry is counting on you and your colleagues to continue fighting so that the motorcoach industry will still be alive and be able to provide the necessary help to our fellow Americans in times of need.

As you know New England Coach is a small business based out of Raymond, New Hampshire. Our business started with a dream of bringing people together through travel and create lasting memories for people who otherwise would not have these experiences. We are a tour operator as well as a motorcoach charter company. In January we were geared up for a record-breaking year with 70 percent of our tours sold out. Tours were planned that spanned from Newfoundland, Canada to Hawaii and Seattle to Savannah and just about everywhere in between. I have had to keep up with the evolving regulations and guidelines that seem to change daily. The nature of our tours brings us to different states and countries. Since all states are different this is a task that is very time consuming and difficult. These past four months I have had to shift gears away from planning tours to figuring out how to make payroll, how to ensure confidence in our passengers that we were going to survive as a business and most importantly filing for loans and grants.

I would like to share with you a bit more about my industry and what it means to me personally so perhaps you can share this with your colleagues. Our industry is filled with family businesses, some which have been in the same family for over 100 years. On May 13th, 2020 close to 1000 motorcoaches descended on Washington, DC to bring awareness to the dire straits that we as an industry are facing. These companies had little to no income coming in. These companies paid their own fuel, accommodations, meals, employees pay and insurances to get to DC and participate. Once this rally cry was heard these owners decided within a short 2-3 weeks that they were going to invest in this cause together with no guarantees of the outcome. New England Coach has one bus. We did not go to Washington thinking that we needed to be saved by a bailout. We went because we understand that for the survival of our industry, we needed to do our part. I want every bus company to survive. I cannot think of any other industry that would do what the motorcoach industry was able to do that day. Our associations (American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association) asked and we responded loudly with a yes!

I know as a citizen of the United States how valuable the services of our industry are. I have spent countless hours educating my passengers and my community on the importance of the motorcoach industry. I am fortunate enough to be able to run leisure tours which allows me to showcase so many amazing destinations and attractions. I am so thankful for the opportunity to do what I love and share my passion for travel with so many. I am proud of what I have built and will continue to fight for my industry. I appreciate your help and continued support as we navigate through these difficult times.

Sincerely,

Belinda Grace-Leonard, CTIS  
Vice President  
New England Coach  
Raymond, New Hampshire
The Honorable Cory Booker  
U.S. Senate  
717 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  

Dear Mr. Booker,

I hope this letter finds you safe and well.

My name is Claudia Rutt and I work in the motorcoach and transportation industry. I have been a part of this industry for over 36 years. I started my career at A-1 Limousine in 1984 as a cleaner. That same year I earned my CDL and was able to support the company as a substitute driver for local trips. Over the years I have been promoted to my current position as the Assistant Fleet Manager and Motorcoach Trainer.

Sadly, the motorcoach industry has been forgotten by all the stimulus packages meant to support the economy and small businesses like the one I work at. Previous grants and loans have been earmarked for the airlines, airports, public transit and Amtrak with no mention of the motorcoach industry. Did you know that our industry provides 600 million passenger trips annually? Transportation by motorcoach comes in second only to airlines (and by a very small margin).

The U.S. motorcoach Industry's role in the national transport network is often overlooked. Not only do we contribute to the travel and tourism industry, but we provide vital services during time of need and crisis, especially in places where the airlines and trains cannot. We move our military between bases, provide medical services, connect travelers between cities, serve rural and urban communities, and are key players during national emergencies. The New Jersey motorcoach community has banded together to provide emergency transportation during hurricanes and evacuation-necessary events.

From my personal experience, the industry is important because we move so many people; family groups, sports teams, wedding parties, tourist and beyond. It is one of the safest forms of travel and you get to enjoy the view as you journey to your destination. Friends, families and new faces alike are making lasting memories during these trips.

As I mentioned before, I work at A-1 Limousine in Princeton, New Jersey. We are a small family owned company that, prior to the pandemic, employed over 200 chauffeurs, bus drivers and office employees. Founded in 1964, A-1 Limousine has been providing our community with an essential service and has never experienced the decimating effects of a crisis such as this.

The impact has been absolutely devastating.

Nearly all coach drivers and chauffeurs have been laid off, which only adds to their own personal hardships. The majority of the mechanics and office employees have been laid off as well. It is incredibly sad to see so much of the fleet sitting idle in the yard. We continue to start them on a regular basis to keep them ready to for when things begin to open and people start moving again, but right now everything feels very quiet. The shop and office are quiet. The hustle and bustle of the day has disappeared, and we know that even when businesses start opening again, it does not mean that travel will resume to it's pre-pandemic state for quite some time.

This has impacted my personal life as well. I wonder when our business will pick back up again. Will our industry even survive? I have been in this industry for 36 years, if the motorcoach industry does receive the help it needs, what does that mean for my own future? How will I survive?

If Congress finally acknowledges the importance of our industry and provides us with the funding we so desperately need, it will help to get us through these dark times so that we are still around when travel does pick back up again. With proper funding we can continue to invest in enhanced cleaning and sanitizing procedures. We can continue to fund our fleet and make the necessary repairs when needed.

There will come a time when motorcoaches are needed again. But will we even be around to help?

As you continue to work to aid our communities, I ask that you consider my story, include my business and our industry to support us during this critical time. I have watched many fellow motorcoach operators go out of business during this crisis. We need grants and loans specific to our industry.

Please help save us.

Sincerely,

Claudia Rutt
A-1 Limousine
Princeton, New Jersey
800-367-0070
The Honorable Sen. Cory Booker
adam_zipkin@booker.senate.gov

The Honorable Sen. Robert Menendez
robert_kelly@menendez.senate.gov

The Honorable Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman
kevin.block@mail.house.gov

Dear Congressional Delegation of New Jersey,

Since I was a young girl, I grew up with a family engulfed in the travel business. My grandfather, Gil Sussman, founded Starr Bus Charter & Tours in 1947 and 73 years later, my parents own the business while my husband and I operate the business. Even my three teenagers have worked for the business! Into its 4th generation, this company called STARR is not just a company; it’s truly an extended family.

Prior to March 16, 2020, Starr employed 110 individuals who had an average of 16 years of tenure with Starr. 16 years! Average! We worked together to provide safe and comfortable bus trips for both groups and individuals. But what we really provided were MEMORIES. We have had countless celebrations on our trips, engagements, honeymoons, state championships, conventions, rallies, vacations, casino junkets and so much more. SO MUCH MORE!

Since March 16th, our buses have been parked and our complete staff has been laid off or terminated. As a business owner, it is devastating to see this happen to so many wonderful people who have worked so hard to build a business that provides such a wonderful service to so many people. My husband and I have been working tirelessly, 7 days a week, taking cancelations, processing refunds, postponing trips, asking our suppliers and customers to be patient as they await their payments or refunds while we closely manage our cash flow. We have done back presentations, insurance negotiating, loan requests and even spent personal funds to help the company stay afloat. Our doors are shut, lights off, gates locked and we wait. We have been patient but we are anxious to get back to work and back to building a business that has given to so many for 73 years. Prior to COVID-19, we were actively advertising and selling multi-day vacations and day trips for the balance of 2020 while our buses were busy getting ready to take students on their hard-earned field trips. It’s sad to say that no field trips have happened and our trips have all been canceled or postponed. Devastating,

Our company needs your help and we need it fast. Please. With your help, we can rehire our staff and make plans to be a robust company again. We yearn to talk to our valued customers, plan their trips, provide them safe and friendly bus service with the cleanest and safest buses. I understand that Congress will take a big step toward providing $10 billion in economic relief for over-the-road buses, including the private motorcoach, tour and charter industry, with the introduction of the Coronavirus Economic Relief for Transportation Services Act (CERTS Act). It will be introduced by Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Jack Reed (D-RI) and would be used to provide grants and other forms of emergency assistance. Please vote YES!

I know this pandemic has created a challenging time for everyone. From individuals to extended families, from sole proprietors to large companies. Our government has provided assistance to air travel, rail travel and now it’s time for them to support bus travel. Our company has been there to support our government in times of distress and we are asking you to support us now. I thank you in advance for allowing us to restore our staff and our company and I look forward to having our buses on the road again soon.

Sincerely,

Sandy Borowsky
Vice President
Starr Bus Charter & Tours
Trenton, New Jersey
609-587-7208
The Honorable Brian Higgins  
House of Representatives  
Rayburn House Office Building  
2459 Rayburn House  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Brian Higgins,

I work in a motorcoach company located in Western New York. Our company was actually started by my grandfather in 1950. He provided limousine tours of the Niagara region. My husband purchased the business from him in 1988 and grew the business from a couple of vans to a fleet of 16 vehicles including 8 motor coaches. We now do foreign language tours, local sightseeing tours, executive and collegiate transportation, weddings, wine tours, school trips, ski trips etc. Our buses have traveled all over the country. Every component of our business shut down on March 16, 2020. Every employee has been furloughed. Even our state park has notified us that tour operators or charter groups would not be permitted at this time. The Seneca casino is not permitting groups until October. The 2020 tourist season is becoming a bust. Niagara Falls cannot survive without visitors. The transportation industry is vital for our visitors. Our community needs the bus industry to continue providing their transportation needs.

During the last four months, my husband and I have agonized over what is the best course of action we could take. We have taken advantage of the various loans, grants, PPP program but are unsure of how long these funds will last given the unknown future and viability of our industry. Our vendors for the most part have graciously deferred payments or reduced their fees, but they need to survive too. Most deferments or reductions were for 3 months. Everyone thought this was going to be over in a couple of months. Our industry is predicting a much longer recovery up to 18 months. We need help, not loans.

We sent one of our buses to Washington for the Buses Move America Rally this past May. I hope you were there to witness that. My driver and manager who went said it was a trip of a lifetime for them. They were hoping that something would have come out of it, but so far, nothing.

Naturally, this business is important to me as it carries my mother’s family name. I am hoping that you present our plight to Congress.

Anita O’Hear  
Secretary  
Bedore Tours, Inc.  
North Tonawanda, New York  
716-696-3200
The Honorable John Katko  
2457 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand  
478 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Katko, Mrs. Gillibrand and Mr. Schumer,

The travel industry is my life and one of the hardest hit industries due to the Coronavirus. I am looking for guidance and hope to get my story to Congress that the industry needs help and relief.

I am a 1999 Niagara University graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in travel and tourism. I was a flight attendant for US Airways, and I have worked in the group travel/motor coach industry for the last 18 years. Three years ago, I started my own successful tour company, Lasting Impression Tours, Inc. I specialize in student and senior citizen groups with 30-110 passengers per tour. My company is a member of the American Bus Association (ABA), we are IATAN accredited and on October 1, 2018 I applied for my MWBE certification with New York State; I am waiting on approval.

Avoca Central School was booked to go to Washington, D.C. on March 20-21, 2020; my first school trip of a busy spring travel season. On March 16, 2020, they cancelled their motor coach trip due to the Coronavirus pandemic. It was downhill from there; all spring and summer group tours have been cancelled and I am in the process of cancelling fall tours. My company refunded all groups 100%. I was hoping to save some winter tours, but it is not looking good. At this point my hope is for 2021, but if schools do not go back in the fall it will be exceedingly difficult to plan a class trip for the upcoming year.

In 2019 my business was booming and 2020 was looking even better before the start of the pandemic. In 2019 my gross sales were $594,000.00. A few examples of what Lasting Impression Tours contributed to the economy in 2019; we paid out $131,149 to motor coach companies, $126,460 to hotels, $73,140 to attractions/theatre and $54,314 to restaurants. My sales for the first and second quarter of 2020 is $0.00, third quarter group tours are being cancelled and things do not look good for the fourth quarter. My prediction is that I will have $0 sales this year.

I received $18,000 in the first round of the payroll protection loan that I am grateful for, but this is not enough to cover the loss I am going to take in 2020 and beyond. I am asking for Congress to allow for small businesses; especially those in the travel industry who have been hit the hardest to apply for a second round of forgivable PPP loans.

The devastation due to the pandemic happened over night to the group travel industry. Until there is a treatment and/or a vaccine our industry will not return.

I will do anything to get my story and the stories of others to you and Congress. Please let me know what I can do. I look forward to speaking and working with you soon.

Sincerely,

Kelly DeStefano  
President  
Lasting Impression Tours, Inc.  
Syracuse, New York  
315-439-4200

Lasting Impression tours
Dear Senator Burr,

I'm a small business owner in Raleigh, North Carolina who depends on the travel industry for my livelihood. The L&W Team helps tour operators and motorcoach companies implement technology to save time and money. The projects I work on allow these companies to continue to meet compliance standards and operational needs with lean management teams who may be working from home. A partnership with us was ROI positive prior to COVID-19 and I expect it will be even more valuable as the industry adapts to new expectations in a post-pandemic world.

However, we can't do business until our clients do business.

When the pandemic hit, I was on a six-week sales road trip. Our business started in June 2019, so I was pounding the pavement to build relationships that are critical to establishing trust and a foundation in the industry. On March 15, I had eight appointments with motorcoach operators scheduled in the upcoming ten days and all of them had to be cancelled. A week later, our largest L&W Team client went bankrupt.

The stay-at-home orders forced a complete halt of travel and our business changed dramatically overnight. Our potential clients in the motor coach industry had to offer an absolutely insane amount of refunds to customers at a time where many could barely pay the insurance and loan payments on their buses.

It’s heart-breaking to hear these real-life stories because I wasn't always a technology consultant. I was a sightseeing bus and boat operator for more than 10 years before switching sides a few years ago. Even though I could work in a different industry, I don't want to. This industry gets inside of you like no other. Regardless of which segment of the travel industry you work in, the people in this industry are the best. From customers to clients to other vendors, this industry is filled with friendly, caring and resilient people.

Unlike many other industries, most of these companies are small businesses, like mine. Because of that, we don't have deep pockets to hire lobbyists and the $237 billion economic impact of our industry has been largely forgotten by Congress. Please don't overlook this industry of 2 million hard-working Americans who care deeply about providing great customer experiences to people on vacation, commuters, business travelers or families enjoying life's most memorable events.

Through it all, I stay positive, but it's frustrating to see every sector of transportation bailed out — except private motor coaches. If these companies are not helped back on their feet, the ripple effects will be felt throughout the entire economy. Who will transport guests at a wedding? Who will evacuate families in the path of a hurricane? How many more times will 56 individual cars be on the road instead of one bus? There is already a driver and mechanic shortage in the industry and it won't be long before these employees must find work in other industries to pay their own bills.

For both businesses and individuals alike, when you're not sure where or when you'll bring in more revenue, it is impossible to think about growth and opportunity. Many companies are stalled and unsure how to proceed. I feel this on a personal basis while I do my best to support other small businesses in Raleigh, but am also cognizant of my limited capital in an uncertain future.

If you only take one thing away from this letter, let it be this: Motorcoach operators need clarity towards their financial future. If Congress is able to earmark specific funds for this sector of the transportation industry, these companies will have the financial stability they need to move forward with effective business decisions to survive until the travel industry returns.

Please help the bus industry. These companies must survive so that I can too.

Sincerely,

Trisha Fridrich
Principal
The L&W Team
West Richland, Washington
866-353-4537
Dear Representative Smucker,

It was a sad day on March 16, 2020 when I was told at 1:00 pm to go home due to COVID-19. I left the office with a confidence that I would be returning at the end of March. It is now June 24, 2020 and I am still not back in the office. Being a small, single owner company, having our doors closed for over three months has had an impact that we may never recover from! It is heartbreaking to be doing nothing but cancelations and seeing the year just continue to spiral downward...

I fell into the tourism industry by default some 20 years ago. I knew right away that this is where I belong and could not imagine doing anything else! I have grown from someone who didn't know what a tour operator was into being one and owning my own business!! My most beloved position in the industry is as a Group Sales Director. In this position, I sell my destination to groups from all over the world to come to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and the Amish Experience. My heart has been broken when day after day, our parking lot remains empty. Especially since 2020 was to be our best year ever! So many of the motorcoach companies that I work with have closed their door permanently due to COVID19. They thought they would receive help from our government as did airlines and others but, that help has not come. For some, it is too late.

Every day, I wait for the call to tell me that I am no longer going to be a part of the industry I love. This has caused a stress for me like I have never known. I know many who have received this call and believe me when I say, this will have a tremendous impact on the economic impact of not only Pennsylvania but the country!

Our motorcoach companies need your help! I need your help! Without tourists and groups coming to Lancaster County, I will be on the unemployment line... Won't you please help me to keep my job in an industry that I love and consider funding for the motorcoach industry? After all, they move America!

Sincerely,

Lois Stoltzfus, CTIS
Group Sales Director
Amish Experience
Bird In Hand, Pennsylvania
717-768-8400 x 214
Dear Senators Graham and Scott, and Congressman Wilson

I left a career as a register nurse to work in our family-owned motorcoach tour business in 1990, when my husband, Charles T Young, Jr who flew for the Air National Guard and owner of our business, was called up to active duty during Desert Shield / Desert Storm. This has been a rewarding and productive business. I have put every effort forward during the last 28 years to making our company one of the top-motorcoach tour companies in our state.

We charter buses and offer fully planned motorcoach tours for any group and travel throughout the USA. March, April, and May are our busiest months and provide a living for, not only me and my family, but for 22 other employees of Capitol Tours and Capitol Bus Lines family. The motorcoach tour business offers groups an opportunity to travel together for business or pleasure to meet the interest or needs to enjoy this beautiful country. Most of our customer base are School Groups and Senior Groups.

Due to COVID-19, we have not only lost these important customer bases, but also other groups such as social groups, business groups, church groups, etc. Our last tour completed was on March 13, 2020 when an elementary school group of 124 students and chaperones went to Charleston for the day. All tours have cancelled though the summer and there are no bookings for the foreseeable future.

Since March 13, 2020, we have worked canceling tours and getting refunds to our customers. Our office staff has been cut by 1/3. The office staff that is working reduced hours, here only 16 hours or less each week. We file unemployment for eligible employees which offers them real help through the end of July due to the federal unemployment subsidy. The base unemployment rate in our State of $326 cannot sustain someone with a mortgage, car payment and utility bills for every long. Also, under the current 26-week limit for unemployment, even this base unemployment will no longer be available. We need, not only an extension of benefits, but an increased base amount.

Although we have applied for $750,000 of the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (a $2 million limit), we only received $150,000. There is a date in the future that we will ultimately know we are going to be viable or be forced to close our business. As of the end of June we have had 60% of our annual revenue cancel for 2020 due to COVID-19, however, I cannot tell you the amount of revenue we will not have since we do not have the customers calling for buses and tours.

During normal times, groups book their trips for the following year when they return from their trips in a current year. Customers who have done motorcoach trips know that you must book early in order to get the buses needed for their group travel needs.

The many loans that are offered sound good but for each loan it only adds to our debt, which we cannot sustain for long without income. We are asking for either loan forgiveness or some help with grants in order to ride out this downfall.

As a woman-owned motorcoach tour company, we have been successful over the years and look forward to remaining in business for many more years. This has certainly put a halt to every tour in the foreseeable future. I don't expect the senior population to return to group travel very quickly and, depending on requirement from our school districts, schools may not return until 2021-2022 school year. Since most of the school tours are completed in the spring, it means it will take 2 years before we see real recovery.

I appreciate your taking the time to read this. I pray for you and your support for our industry during this unprecedented time in our history.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Young
Owner
Capitol Tours LLC
West Columbia, South Carolina
803-794-9661
Dear Senator Haile,

I am writing to you today to share my experience as a media consultant in the bus industry and to explain how COVID-19 has impacted me personally.

Last November, I left my job as a journalist and editor so that I could be home with my three children, one of whom has special needs, and work with my husband who owns his own business. I decided to take on some freelance and consulting jobs to help supplement our income, and shortly thereafter, I began working as a media consultant to On Your Mark Transportation, a consulting firm for the bus and transportation industry.

I began working with the company writing regular blog posts for their website and press releases for submission to local and national bus and transportation publications. I also wrote and submitted articles for publication in various magazines.

Unfortunately, I began working in the industry just a few short months before the pandemic began, which has had a lasting effect on the industry. I went from writing several blogs a month and a variety of press releases and articles to not writing anything at all.

Because many companies in the industry shut down or were severely impacted by the pandemic, clients of On Your Mark Transportation were not looking to spend money on marketing. And that meant a halt of work for me as a consultant in the industry.

While the impact on me is small compared to the impact on the industry as a whole, the pandemic has definitely affected my ability to bring in supplemental income for my family.

The pandemic has affected so many people in the industry – from the business owners to the drivers, the mechanics to the consultants and to the salesmen and women and writers like me. The pandemic isn't just affecting big businesses.

It’s affecting women like me, who are doing everything they can to provide for their families during a global pandemic. My husband owns his own business repairing home appliances, and especially during the beginning of lockdown, he experienced a tremendous loss of business. Although he was deemed an essential worker, many people were understandably uncomfortable with having him come into their homes. He was working so much less, in fact, that he took off at least one day a week for several weeks for lack of calls. During this time, it would have been important for me as a freelancer and consultant to be able to provide some extra income for our family. But as the bus industry took a large hit, so too did my ability to do the work that would have helped my family tremendously during such a rough time. The loss of potential income for me was a hurdle we had to overcome as a family.

We need the support of our representatives in the Senate and Congress to help stimulate the bus industry and provide assistance for so many who have been impacted.

I recently read that between 80 and 95 percent of motorcoach trips were canceled due to the pandemic, which equals $4.8 billion since March. Based on projections, should the pandemic continue, more than 90 percent of jobs in the industry would be lost in a year’s time, according to a report from the American Bus Association.

My story is a small one. I didn’t lose my job. I lost supplemental income. But so many people in the industry lost their jobs due to the pandemic. On Your Mark Transportation lost business as the companies it represents took major hits. And for me, that meant missing out on opportunities to provide content for clients.

I hope that hearing my small story will allow you just a glimpse into the vast effect of this pandemic on so many people.

Sincerely,

Amy Nixon
Media Consultant
On Your Mark Transportation LLC
Nashville, Tennessee
615-758-9575
The Honorable Ann Wagner
2350 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Wagner,

Thank you for your time in learning about the impact COVID-19 has had on jobs, community and our industry as a whole.

I have been in the motorcoach and limousine industry for over 30 years. I grew up in our family owned business starting out washing cars. I worked my way up through the company to become CEO for over 12 years. I am now a consultant within the passenger ground transportation industry and enjoy working with and helping other big and small family owned transportation companies.

The past six months has been heart breaking. To see the motorcoach industry, as well as so many other industries, come to a complete stop has been devastating. Within our industry, there are approximately 36,000 vehicles/buses parked, 100,000 jobs at risk, which include drivers, cleaners, maintenance and repair, administrative and safety personnel, and 8 billion, and rising, in lost revenue. The many years of hard work, each person has put into their livelihood and career, was taken from them within months. It was personally hard to witness my father deciding to finally shut the doors, on the family owned business, after 35 years due to the pandemic.

These companies play a critical role in providing transportation for special events, schools, essential government and emergency transportation services during hurricanes, floods earthquakes, and other disasters. The U.S motorcoach industry is requesting Congress put motorcoaches back on the road by making available $10 billion in grants for operational and payroll assistance and $5 billion in long term 0% interest rate loans to the industry, $5 billion in long term zero percent interest rate loans to the industry, and modifications to the PPP and EIDL, providing funding through the end of the calendar year.

It will be disastrous if we lose these companies and they are not there when the world is ready to start moving again. We cannot forget that this industry “Moves America”.

Sincerely,

Lynn Sansone
VP of Consulting
On Your Mark Transportation, LLC
Nashville, Tennessee
615-738-9575
The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC  20510  

Dear Senator Alexander:

Russell Coach Company, LLC operates motorcoaches unlike many of the motorcoaches on the road today as our vehicles operate leases to entertainers, politicians and other high-profile clients. We are often referenced to as an entertainer bus company. Primarily, our buses are used to carry people and equipment to various entertainment venues and political events with the benefit of providing sleeping and meeting space. However, under the current COVID-19 government directives, our business has come to a complete stop, with mass cancellations of tours and events, leaving our vehicles to sit idle. We were able to receive the PPP but as you well know it is only for eight weeks and our eight weeks ends this week on June 26. I am concerned that we will have to furlough most of our employees.

My husband began Russell Coach Company in March of 1995 when he was only 24 years old. We met in 2001 and married in 2003. I became our Leasing Manager in 2007. I handle all bus scheduling, communicate with clients and tour managers, and oversee all our drivers. While this year, our 25th Anniversary was scheduled to be the best revenue year in the history of our company, COVID-19 quickly changed that. We have a fleet of 11 entertainer buses and also have our own conversion and maintenance shop which operates as Russell Coachworks, LLC. Between both companies we employ 15+ people. While that is a low number compared to many other employers, we are burdened for our company and employees. Our buses travel all across the United States primarily taking entertainers from show to show during their tour. This time last year we were over $1.7 million for a year (2019) that ended over $3.5+ million. Today, at no fault of our own, solely due to COVID-19, all of our tours had to cancel due to venues not being open and travel coming to a standstill. As we ended 2019 with over $3.5 million; we are currently on track to end 2020 with less than $200,000. We went from having a schedule full of tours to every single bus being parked. These numbers have a huge impact on our business, our employees, and our personal family (we have two children ages 12 and 5).

At a minimum, the U.S. motorcoach industry needs grant assistance. We want to remain in business and be ready when venues are open and tours resume. We need your assistance in helping our company, which has always been a strong financial company, get through this devastating time of COVID-19 so that we may continue our name and legacy in the entertainer bus industry.

Sincerely,

Wendy M. Russell  
Leasing Manager  
Russell Coach  
Knoxville, Tennessee  
865-525-3888
Dear Mr. Rob Wittman and Mr. Mark Warner,

Today, the Gallop and Hall family write to you in our time of need. We hope you will see this letter, as we need help saving our family business.

Venture Tours may have started in 1996, but is part of a family legacy that began in 1949 with Gallop Bus Lines. This was started by my father, Ray Gallop, who at the time worked at the Naval Air Station. He began using a passenger van to provide transportation to employees at the station. Ray's daughter, Darlene Gallop Hooks (President of Venture Tours), was born into the bus business and began helping out at the age of four years old. I helped clean the buses. As I got older, I began helping my brother repair them. I also worked in the office, doing daily deposits, filing, writing checks, and check collection. Then in 1977, my mother passed away. I stepped up to the challenge of bookkeeping, reservations, and payroll.

After leaving the company, in 1996 I invested into five coaches under the name “Hall Bus Lines” and worked out of my own house. After one year, we became Venture Tours. With my son Jimmy Hall as Vice President and me as President, we combined our third-generation experience and became one of the most successful charter bus companies in Coastal Virginia. A woman owned and operated business that grew to 38 coaches in early 2020.

My grandchildren are beginning to get involved. It was my dream to pass along the business to them as the fourth generation in our business. Due to the pandemic crisis we have 38 motorcoaches sitting in our yard with no work. We had 96 employees, including drivers, mechanics, office staff, and cleaners. We are now down to 17 employees. We are struggling to keep our team intact as we have lost at least 95 percent of our business due to COVID. With no income, we don't know how much longer we can go. Our lives have been affected. Especially the lives of 79 people we are no longer able to pay. Many of which, have been with us since the old days of Gallop Bus Lines and are as close to being family as anyone will ever be. It has reached the point where the core team here at Venture is only able to maintain itself by scrambling for loans such as PPP to keep ourselves paid, but we are going to need much more help than that to keep ourselves alive. This isn’t just an issue that pertains to us, this is a cry for help from the entire motor-coach industry. This is an industry unlike any other form of transportation. This is an industry that is mainly operated by family and small businesses with few exceptions (such as Greyhound). We are not Delta Airlines. We are not the metros.

What would it mean for us if Congress were to help?

When Congress passed the Coronavirus Act, our industry was left out and forgotten. 60 Billion went to the Airlines. The transportation industry as a whole was aided, with the exception of our industry. We are an industry of families and small businesses that transport America, including Military, NATO, Congress, Universities and Schools. We don’t have the support that these major transportation companies have. The motorcoach business is a different beast. When we lose our business, we die. When we downsize, we begin erasing our very foundation and we don’t have anywhere else to pull from. We are backed against the wall. We are on our last legs of survival and many of our close peers have closed their doors. Not only would you save the families, you would save an important industry that moves America. Our industry comes to YOU as our last hope and we hope you will lend your voice to help give us the financial support that we desperately need.

Sincerely,

Darlene Hooks
President
Venture Tours
Virginia Beach, Virginia
757-494-1480
ISSUE: The need for financial support to save the U.S. motorcoach industry.

BACKGROUND: The COVID-19 crisis has decimated the U.S. motorcoach industry. Prior to the outbreak, the industry was comprised of successful, primarily small, family owned businesses providing public transportation services. It was a $15 billion industry (not including the tourism impact), providing nearly 600 million passenger trips annually. Broadly, it provided diverse public transportation services, including intercity scheduled service, commuter service, charter/tour, shuttle, school transport, contracted service to public transit entities, and emergency response and defense operations. The industry supported over 3,000 motorcoach businesses, employing a direct workforce of nearly 100,000 employees, operating a fleet of around 36,000 vehicles. But now, in the wake of COVID-19 and government directives for sheltering in place/travel restrictions, this passenger carrying industry has been brought to a standstill with relatively no recovery for the remainder of 2020.

Industry Snapshot: End of March – mid April:
- Scheduled service operations (approx. 100 companies/~30K employees) – at max, operating at 15% capacity, with few riders and feeder systems shutdown.
- Commuter service (approx. 300 companies/~9,000 employees) – operating at 5-10% capacity, with few riders.
- Charter – 99.9% shutdown (only a few military movements, and 1-off services for government entities).

RECOVERY OUTLOOK: Currently, the industry outlook for recovery is, at best, 24-months or longer. As economies begin to reopen and businesses restore or resume normal operations, the motorcoach industry will not see a recovery for an extended period of time because:

- It is a capital-intensive, heavily regulated industry, with a specialized workforce that is not easy to replace.
- Continuing concerns about the virus and travel by mass transit, will keep ridership down.
- Directives from the Center for Disease Control calling for on-going social distancing requirements, and restrictions and cancellation of school field trips and extracurricular activities, along with entertainment and sports events, will also keep ridership/trips down.
- Increased costs for sanitizing and ensuring the health safety of vehicles, will further exacerbate operational costs.

Although similar to the air/airport, rail and public transit transportation modes, in terms nature of operations and reliance on passengers, the motorcoach industry has received little to no financial assistance to bridge this unprecedented economic crisis. The PPP and Disaster Assistance programs provided only marginal, limited support that is now gone. While other industries have sustained some level of operations through April into June, most of the motorcoach industry and its fleet has sat idle, with workers laid-off or furloughed, and it will remain so for the remainder of the year. For the charter industry, especially, where 50-60% of the revenue is generated in March-May, and the remainder in the fall, this pandemic has particularly strained the market.

ASK: The U.S. motorcoach industry needs specific and direct economic relief in the form of grants ($10B) and low-interest, long-terms loans ($5B). As well, the industry seeks liability protection.

*These numbers remained fairly constant through May into June, with a slight improvement (1-2%) for scheduled intercity bus services through mid-June.