July 21, 2017

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Tester:

On behalf of the American Bus Association (ABA) and the entire intercity bus industry, I seek your support for funding the Intercity Bus Security Grant Program in the FY2018 Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

The ABA represents the intercity motorcoach industry, a thriving industry providing more than 600 million passenger trips annually, on par with U.S. commercial aviation operations and significantly more than Amtrak. Intercity bus service includes scheduled intercity service, charter, commuter operations, sightseeing tours, shuttles and operations supporting high-profile events such as a golf tournaments or political conventions. In the wake of the horrific events of September 11, 2001, Congress recognized the need to address security risks threatening surface transportation modes serving the public, identifying the intercity bus industry specifically by establishing the Intercity Bus Security Grant Program (IBSGP) in the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. This IBSGP assistance is only one part, but a critical part, of formalized program put in place to ensure our industry takes appropriate actions to defend from, and be prepared in the event of, a security incident.

Since the establishment of the IBSGP, including funding provided through the annual appropriations process prior to the establishment of the program, 325 motorcoach operators around the country have benefited from grant assistance. Yet, there remain significant unmet needs – in 2016 alone, a total of $22 million in grant requests were made while only $3 million was available to award. The intercity bus industry is primarily comprised of small businesses, with 94% of the companies operating less than 25 motorcoaches - yet, these operators provided 42.3% of the 604 million passenger trips in 2104. The grant assistance provided by the IBSGP is critical to their operations, particularly when balancing operational business needs with the costs of mitigating risks posed by the current threat environment.

The IBSGP assistance is awarded through a competitive program administered jointly by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the Federal Emergency Management Administration, and is limited to operators who maintain a DHS approved security plan and provide service to Urban Area Security Initiative-designated jurisdictions, to maintain the integrity of the program. The funds are used for building fence perimeters; purchase/implementation of security cameras; purchase/implementation of metal detection screening equipment; installation of driver shields; enabling GPS tracking of vehicle; vulnerability assessments and training exercises to coordinate response efforts with law enforcement and first responders. Further, our industry partners very closely with TSA to ensure operators are taking appropriate steps to address the ever-changing threat environment, through exercises, development of policy guidance, and routine communications.
As you know, the major threat facing our nation now are actions by homegrown violent extremists or HVE, many of whom are inspired to commit violent acts from online propaganda produced by foreign terrorist organizations. As evidenced in the news, almost daily, extremists are increasingly turning to large vehicles for use as weapons and cities across the United States are ramping up security in public spaces to protect from such attacks. The intercity bus industry plays a key role in this defense strategy as the operators of large vehicles and users of shared public terminal facilities at both public transit and Amtrak stations. In addition, unlike public transit operators, private intercity bus operators pay tolls, registration fees, fuel taxes, income taxes and other expenses, and do not add to the taxpayer burden of funding surface transportation. As with public transit operators and Amtrak, our industry should be equally prepared to mitigate these threats and respond to emergency situations, especially when these modes operate at shared terminal facilities.

I urge you to fund to the IBSGP in the FY 2018 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, in an amount at least equivalent to Amtrak funding at $10 million. The intercity bus industry wants to remain prepared in this ever-changing threat environment rather than face tragic consequences due to a lack of preparedness. The IBSGP program plays a critical role in assisting the intercity bus industry with this goal, in coordination with the other surface transportation modes.

I stand ready to answer any questions you may have about the intercity bus industry or the IBSGP, and may be reached at (202) 218-7229.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Pantuso
President & CEO
American Bus Association

CC: The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations