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Many bus drivers have arrests

More than 100 in CPS charged since 1991

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Nearly one in four Cincinnati Public Schools bus drivers has been arrested since 1991 - at least 50 of them on violent charges, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Greg Hartmann has found.

Of the 458 drivers, who are not named in the data given to The Enquirer, 111 have been arrested on 242 charges, records from the clerk's office show. The charges include six drunken driving charges, 12 drug charges and 25 domestic violence charges. In many cases, the charges were dismissed or amended to lesser crimes, the records show.

No driver has been arrested on felony or sex charges, Hartmann said.

Records show:

One driver was arrested in 2003 on a charge of domestic violence after allegedly punching a person in the head. The driver was convicted of a lesser disorderly conduct charge, fined and put on probation.

Another driver was convicted of DUI in 2003 - which by state law should make him ineligible to drive a school bus. The driver was sentenced to six days in jail, three of them in a driver's intervention program. The driver also was fined \$250 and ordered to spend a year on probation and to get alcohol treatment.

Last year, a driver was convicted of resisting arrest.

Cincinnati Public Schools is the first district to take Hartmann up on his offer to check driver's names against Hamilton County criminal records.

"The DUIs are significant and the drug charges, too," Hartmann said. "We want to know if somebody driving a school bus has a drug problem."

Besides a DUI or OVI conviction in the last six years, some of the many disqualifying charges include drug abuse, domestic violence, trafficking in drugs and child endangering.

"The transportation department is going through the information," said Dawn Grady, a Cincinnati Public Schools spokeswoman.

"I can definitely say if we find any disqualifying conviction then those drivers will be pulled from their route. That dismissal will be as immediate as us discovering the information," she added. "We want to make sure the drivers who serve our routes are qualified to serve our routes so the children are safe."

Hartmann turned the information over to the district Friday.

The district uses three bus companies to transport more than 33,000 students a day to private schools, charter schools and the district's own schools.

The state requires districts to check bus operators' driving records twice a year and do a criminal background check every six years, though districts can do checks as often as they want.

Cincinnati Public Schools does statewide background checks on all drivers every two years and local background checks twice a year.

Cincinnati Parents for Public Schools director Zakia McKinney said she is glad the district agreed to the background checks.

"The bottom line is, parents are looking for their children to be in a safe environment with safe providers from the time they leave their home to the time they get home," McKinney said.

She said the district might have some tough decisions once it's done looking at the information.

"We don't know the story behind all of this, it may be that someone just goofed and were wrong, but were given a second chance," McKinney said.