

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 510
Ways and Means

(Montgomery County Delegation)

Judicial Proceedings

Montgomery County - Education - School Bus - Doors That Lock
MC 27-15

This bill authorizes the Montgomery County Board of Education to use a school bus with doors that lock to transport students in the county, if the locking system prevents the bus from being operated when any bus exit is locked.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) finances are not affected.

Local Effect: Montgomery County school system expenditures may be reduced beginning in FY 2017 to the extent that the authority to install locks on its school buses allows Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to reduce overall costs related to housing its fleet of school buses. Local government revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Small businesses that sell and install bus door locking systems may realize increased revenues.

Analysis

Current Law: The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) specifies that the service door (or doors) of a Type I school vehicle (“school bus”) must have a nonlocking handle for opening it from the outside. There may not be a security locking device on the service door. COMAR further indicates that electric-powered service doors on a school bus must have a nonlocking handle switch directly powered by the battery and that a security locking device may not be installed on the emergency door of a school bus.

Background: MCPS advises that it must relocate approximately 410 of its school buses from their current depot in Shady Grove by no later than January 2017. While it is anticipated that secure sites will be available for the majority of these buses, approximately 80 of the school buses may need to be housed at one or more locations that will not be highly secure. Authorization to lock school buses while not in use would help to make such locations viable options for housing school buses.

MSDE is aware of only two other states, Mississippi and New Hampshire, which require nonlocking doors on public school buses. While concerns have been raised about the possibility of a rider being locked in a school bus after the bus driver has completed his or her route, MSDE notes that rear exits can be opened from the inside of the bus and that certain locking devices feature electronic safeguards.

Local Fiscal Effect: The bill authorizes, but does not require MCPS to install locks on its school buses. At an estimate of \$400 per bus, the cost to install locks on 80 school buses would be approximately \$32,000. Authorization to install locks on some or all of its school buses may afford MCPS more options in terms of the locations in which to house its school buses, to the extent that some locations will only be deemed viable options if the school buses housed there can be locked when not in use. To the extent that these additional options are less costly than options under current law, MCPS may realize an indeterminate amount of cost savings, even after factoring in the cost of installing the locks on school buses. Given the January 2017 deadline for MCPS to relocate its buses, any expenditure savings will be realized beginning in fiscal 2017.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County, Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 24, 2015
md/rhh

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