



HOUSE WAYS & MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 16, 2023

HOUSE BILL 486

INCOME TAX - CREDIT FOR STUDENT BUS TRANSPORTATION EXPENSES

**TESTIMONY OF RABBI ARIEL SADWIN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AGUDATH ISRAEL OF MARYLAND**

SUPPORT

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland, providing support and representation for the 30 Jewish day schools, and for the thousands of parents and children who attend these schools.

ECONOMIC EQUITY IMPACT: A recent survey conducted by Agudah of Maryland with over 1,500 responses from Baltimore families with children in Jewish day schools found that over three quarters of parents find themselves forced to carpool or hire paid drivers to send their children to school. Roughly seventy percent of the respondents said that the strain of ineffective school transportation has caused significant stress in their life, and a majority of respondents added that transportation costs (such as gas, wear-and-tear on vehicles, and the necessity to purchase a large vehicle to accommodate the carpool) are a significant strain on their family budgets, and that they had experienced employment challenges due to the issue. This bill would provide peace of mind and economic relief to struggling families as they deal with the difficulties of transportation, and would allow more parents (particularly women) to enter the job market by freeing them from the constraints of driving to school.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: Every day, hundreds of minivans, SUVs, and other high-occupancy vehicles clog the roads as carpools ferry their children to school. Making school busing a viable option for these families would be a huge step in reducing our state's emissions and would be a tremendously impactful step in meeting the existential challenge of climate change. Given that Maryland school buses are transitioning to be electrically-powered, the impact of replacing hundreds of private vehicles with a fleet of electric buses would drastically reduce the environmental footprint of school transportation.

SAFETY: The swell of vehicles on the community roads during carpool rush hour results in traffic delays and frequent instances of fender-benders. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, students are 70 times more likely to get to school safely when taking a school bus instead of traveling by car, as buses are heavier and distribute crash forces differently than cars, in addition to being equipped with bright lights, large mirrors, and stop-sign arms.¹ Making school busing a viable option would protect both children and other commuters.

COST: The Fiscal and Policy Note for HB 486 estimates a revenue loss of roughly \$10 million. This number must be weighed against current transportation expenditures. For example, a General

¹ <https://www.nsc.org/community-safety/safety-topics/school-safety/buses-safest-transportation-for-school-children>

Assembly report from 2020² found that local school systems in our state spent \$637.3 million on student transportation services in FY 2018 alone, with per pupil student transportation costs exceeding \$1,000 in several counties. The Maryland State Department of Education estimates a \$336 million dollar state expenditure as necessary for adequate school transportation for FY2023.³ Against this backdrop, the cost of this legislation is minimal, especially when weighed against the gains in economic productivity, safety, and environmental impact.

CONCLUSION: Expanding school bus availability would provide economic benefits, environmental benefits, and safety benefits, and advance the cause of equity. We therefore respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB 486.

² https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/fnotes/bil_0006/hb1226.pdf

³ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2023fy-budget-docs-operating-R00A02-MSDE-Aid-to-Education.pdf>