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Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB528 INCOME TAX- CREDIT FOR NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT
BUS TRANSPORTATION EXPENSES

During the 2023 legislative session, the General Assembly passed HB 486, Task Force to Study Nonpublic Student Bus Transportation, enabling a task force to study nonpublic student bus transportation. The task force's goal was to reduce traffic congestion and reduce the environmental impact of personal vehicles utilized for school transportation.

I was a task force participant and we were charged with examining all current forms of transportation that students take to get to and from school, collect data and information from each local board of education, consider other methods of travel for nonpublic students, and to provide recommendations on how to reduce the number of students in private vehicles.

For the 2022 school year, there were roughly 834 private schools serving 139,263 students in Maryland. (MSAR#14844, 2023) The State does not provide any funding for the transportation of private school students (outside of grants provided to LEAs for the transportation of students with a disability.) Parents must either provide transportation for the student or, if the school provides, pay an additional amount to receive bus transportation.

Parents of private school students either must provide transportation or pay for transportation that is provided by the school. Many private schools either do not have the ability to build a transportation program, do not have enough interest from families, or recognize that a transportation program would add such an additional cost to families that it would not be sustainable.

Many of the students that are attending private schools are riding in personal vehicles with family members, resulting in a high number of students being driven to and from school daily which dramatically increases the amount of traffic and thus congestion on the state's highways and roads. The additional pollution caused by these personal vehicles could be greatly reduced if students were consolidated into a multi-passenger vehicle, such as a school bus or are incentivized to carpool.

Students may also walk to school along sidewalks and roadways, causing pedestrian safety concerns. These students may be at a heightened risk for targeting as they wear traditional clothing, hats, headcoverings, or other religious symbols.

SB528 would create a tax credit for parents for daily bus transportation to and from school, with a maximum credit of \$1500 per student. Eligible schools include schools that participate in the nonpublic school textbook and technology program, ensuring that the lowest tuition schools only are included. This bill supports families who want their children to travel to school safely and will help our state reduce the number of cars on the road and decrease our carbon footprint.

I urge a favorable report on SB528. Thank you.