



SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

JANUARY 31, 2024

SENATE BILL 528

INCOME TAX – CREDIT FOR NONPUBLIC SCHOOL 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, and on behalf of the 10,000 students attending 30 Jewish day schools in our great state.

Senate Bill 528 follows the recommendations issued by the Nonpublic School Transportation Task Force based on research conducted this past year, in which a comprehensive study of school transportation options was pursued. After many hours of research studying a variety of options, the Task Force concluded that a tax credit model incentivizing the usage of busing would be the best method of pursuing progress for nonpublic school student transit, thus reducing the environmental and congestion impacts of student transportation. Agudath Israel of Maryland issues this testimony in support of Senate Bill 528, for the following reasons:

- **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 ([source](#)). Making school busing a viable option would protect both children and other commuters. Additionally, children walking to school are vulnerable to hate and other types of crimes, while allowing them to go via school bus provides a layer of security.
- **ECONOMIC EQUITY IMPACT** A recent survey conducted by Agudah of Maryland of over 750 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) is 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 impact of school transportation.

CONCLUSION A General Assembly report ([source](#)) found that local school systems in our state spent \$637.3 million on student transportation services in fiscal 2018 alone, with per pupil student transportation costs exceeding \$1,000 in several counties. Expanding school bus availability would provide economic benefits, environmental benefits, and safety benefits, and advance the cause of equity.

Please issue a FAVORABLE report on **SB 528**.