

Department of Fiscal Services  
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

Senate Bill 118 (Senator Astle)  
Judicial Proceedings

---

**Vehicle Laws - School Vehicles - Standing by Pupils**

---

This bill prohibits a driver of a school bus from transporting pupils in excess of the school bus' seating capacity or allowing pupils to stand while the school bus is in motion, except in an emergency situation as defined by the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA). If the MVA defines overcrowding on a school bus at the beginning of the school year due to the uncertainty about the demand for seating on a given route as an emergency, pupils are permitted to stand only during the first 15-school days of a new school year.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must annually report to the General Assembly by January 1 beginning after the completion of the 1997-1998 school year on the number of buses on which pupils were required to stand during the course of the school year. This bill takes effect July 1, 1997.

---

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None. MSDE's reporting requirements and MVA's regulatory duties could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

**Local Effect:** Potential significant increase in local expenditures. Revenues would not be affected.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful impact on small businesses as discussed below.

---

## Fiscal Analysis

**Local Expenditures:** Current State regulations already prevent students from standing while the bus is in motion, although there are exceptions for emergencies, which include over-crowded conditions at the beginning of the school year. Since some parents fail to notify the school system that their child needs to ride a bus to school, it takes a few weeks at the beginning of the school year to develop routes where students do not exceed the seating capacity. MSDE advises that it generally takes up to 30 days for a school system to correct its routing system to prevent over-crowding. This bill would require local school districts to remedy such conditions within 15 days. Accordingly, this may necessitate the need for additional school buses and drivers at an additional cost of \$81,000 per bus route (\$55,000 in one-time capital cost for one additional school bus and \$26,000 in annual personnel cost for driver).

The Department of Fiscal Services notes that current State regulations governing school bus operations have strict limits on the type of vehicles that can transport students to and from school facilities. For example, leasing other types of buses on a temporary basis to handle over-crowded conditions is not an option for compliance with this bill. The Department of Fiscal Services advises, however, that these additional costs could be reduced through improved local planning and equipping all buses with radios so drivers can notify the central office that an additional bus is needed to complete the route.

**Small Business Effect:** Private contractors provide pupil transportation services in all 24 school districts in the State. In 19 counties, private contractors operate a majority of school vehicles. In fiscal 1996, there were approximately 3,000 private school vehicles under contract statewide. A large segment of these private school vehicles are either owned and operated by individuals or by small transportation companies. Depending upon whether additional school vehicles would be needed to comply with the bill's requirements, these small businesses could be positively impacted.

---

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Fiscal Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 20, 1997

ncs

---

Analysis by: Hiram L. Burch Jr.

Reviewed by: John Rixey

Direct Inquiries to:

John Rixey, Coordinating Analyst

(410) 841-3710

(301) 858-3710