

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 356

(Chairman, Ways and Means Committee)
(By Request – Departmental – Education)

Ways and Means

Judicial Proceedings

Education - School Vehicles - Length of Operation

This departmental bill extends the prohibition against operating a conventional school bus for more than 12 years without obtaining approval from the State Superintendent of Schools and conducting certain safety and maintenance inspections to all school vehicles. Transit-style school vehicles (Type D) may be operated for 15 years if the vehicle was in operation or purchased before July 1, 2004.

The bill retains the exception in current law which allows vehicles in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties to be operated for up to 15 years until June 30, 2006.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2004.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Minimal impact on local school expenditures resulting from additional safety and maintenance inspections on school vehicles in operation beyond 12 years.

Small Business Effect: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has determined that this bill has minimal or no impact on small business (attached). Legislative Services concurs with this assessment.

Analysis

Current Law: Unless it fails to meet safety standards, a conventional school bus may be operated for up to 12 years. A conventional school bus may be operated for more than 12 years if: (1) the State Superintendent of Schools grants approval; (2) the bus is maintained under a preventive maintenance plan that is approved by the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) and the Department of State Police and includes semiannual inspections; (3) any structural repairs to the bus meet or exceed the manufacturer's original manufacturing standards, as certified by an independent expert approved by the MVA; and (4) the bus is properly equipped with specified safety features. A conventional school bus may remain in operation for up to 15 years in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties until July 30, 2006. These requirements do not apply to Type A, B, or D school vehicles.

Background: Four styles of school vehicles are in use by public schools in Maryland: Type A, B, C, and D as designated by the U.S. Department of Transportation. As shown in **Exhibit 1**, Type C conventional school buses are the most commonly used school vehicles in Maryland. State law specifies that these vehicles may not be used beyond 12 years without approval from the State Superintendent. There is no such requirement for Type A, B, or D school vehicles. Accordingly, these school vehicles can be operated beyond 12 years without receiving the approval from the State Superintendent and conducting certain safety and maintenance inspections.

Exhibit 1
Total School Vehicles by Type
Fiscal 2003

<u>Vehicle Type</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Number of Vehicles</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Type A	Van Style	3	0.0%
Type B	Van Style	21	0.3%
Type C	Conventional	5,479	80.8%
Type D	Transit Style	1,280	8.9%
Total		6,783	100.0%

Cost to Purchase School Vehicles

A school vehicle can cost in the range of \$30,000 to \$75,000, depending upon the specifications. Van-conversion style school vehicles can cost approximately \$30,000 to

\$40,000. Conventional or transit-style school vehicles can cost approximately \$54,000 to \$75,000.

The cost to purchase a school bus in Montgomery County is \$68,000 for a 48-passenger bus with wheelchair lift and \$75,000 for a 72-passenger transit-style rear-engine bus. In Prince George's County, the cost is \$56,000 for a 64-passenger bus, \$60,600 for a 34-passenger bus with special seating for pre-kindergarten children, and \$68,200 for a 21-passenger bus with wheelchair lift. In Baltimore County, the cost is \$54,250 for a 64-passenger bus and \$61,100 for a 48-passenger bus with wheelchair lift.

Local Fiscal Effect: Only five local school systems use Type A or Type B school vehicles: Allegany, Calvert, Frederick, Harford, and Talbot counties. Due to their lighter weight and construction, these school vehicles most likely would be retired from service before the twelfth year due to the normal wear and tear on the vehicles. Nineteen local school systems use Type D (transit-style) school vehicles. Due to their heavier construction, transit-style vehicles have a longer life span and could remain in service beyond 12 years. **Exhibit 2** shows the number of school vehicles by type in each jurisdiction.

These new requirements would not have a significant impact on local expenditures because: (1) most Type A and B vehicles would be retired from service prior to the twelfth year; (2) Type D (transit-style) school vehicles in use or purchased prior to July 1, 2004 may be operated for 15 years; (3) over 80% of school vehicles must already meet the bill's requirements; and (4) proper maintenance policies and a plan to upgrade safety policies should already be in place for older school buses in order to ensure student safety.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 5, 2004
ncs/ljm

Analysis by: Hiram L. Burch Jr.

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510

Exhibit 2
Number of School Vehicles by Type
Fiscal 2003

<u>County</u>	<u>Type A</u>	<u>Type B</u>	<u>Type C</u>	<u>Type D</u>	<u>Total</u>
Allegany	1	2	119	0	122
Anne Arundel	0	0	203	296	499
Baltimore City	0	0	314	42	356
Baltimore	0	0	766	0	766
Calvert	0	2	124	5	131
Caroline	0	0	47	5	52
Carroll	0	0	279	22	301
Cecil	0	0	138	0	138
Charles	0	0	212	1	213
Dorchester	0	0	43	9	52
Frederick	2	0	369	6	377
Garrett	0	0	71	4	75
Harford	0	16	336	37	389
Howard	0	0	312	68	380
Kent	0	0	24	6	30
Montgomery	0	0	428	652	1,080
Prince George's	0	0	1,095	58	1,153
Queen Anne's	0	0	80	0	80
St. Mary's	0	0	163	0	163
Somerset	0	0	32	10	42
Talbot	0	1	4	31	36
Washington	0	0	154	1	155
Wicomico	0	0	107	15	122
Worcester	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>71</u>
Total	3	21	5,479	1,280	6,783

Source: Maryland State Department of Education