

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2012 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 210

(St. Mary's County Delegation)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

St. Mary's County - School Buses - Length of Operation

This bill exempts St. Mary's County from the requirement that conventional school buses more than 12 years old meet specific standards and be approved for use by the State Superintendent of Schools. The bill allows conventional school buses in St. Mary's County to operate for 15 years before these requirements apply.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2012.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any reduction in the number of school buses the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must approve for use each year will not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: St. Mary's County Public School System inspection and administrative expenditures may decrease minimally beginning in FY 2013. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal. It is assumed that school bus contractors will pass on any savings associated with reducing inspection and administrative costs to the St. Mary's County Public School System.

Analysis

Current Law: Unless it fails to meet applicable safety standards, a conventional school bus may be operated for up to 12 years, except in Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, where it may be operated for up to 15 years.

Conventional school buses may be operated beyond the 12-year limit 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 a 12-year inspection and subsequent semi-annual 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 MVA; and (4) the bus is properly equipped with specified safety features.

Background: St. Mary's County has 194 school buses, of which 180 are contractor operated and 14 are owned by the county. In fiscal 2011, the county spent \$14.5 million on student transportation, or an estimated \$909 per rider. Statewide, local school systems spent an average of \$747 per rider in fiscal 2011, or \$162 less per rider than in St. Mary's County.

MSDE oversees approval of waivers from the 12-year limitation on the duration of school bus operation. MSDE granted 47 waivers for St. Mary's County for the 2011-2012 school year.

Local Fiscal Effect: St. Mary's County Public School System administrative and inspection expenditures may decrease minimally beginning in fiscal 2013. St. Mary's County Public School System indicates that it will save approximately \$2,500 in inspection fees and \$500 in administrative costs annually based on its use of 50 school buses between 12 and 15 years old.

St. Mary's County Public School System reports that it currently runs its buses on a 15-year replacement schedule; therefore, it does not expect there to be any savings associated with deferring purchasing new school buses.

Small Business Effect: Private student transportation contractors working in St. Mary's County may operate a school bus for three additional years without obtaining approval from the State Superintendent of Schools, participating in a preventative maintenance plan, or meeting certain safety and certification requirements. Therefore, administrative and inspection expenditures may decrease; however, it is expected that most of the savings will be passed on to the St. Mary's County Public School System through lower contract costs.

Since school buses in St. Mary's County currently operate on a 15-year replacement schedule, there is not expected to be any savings associated with deferring the purchase of new school buses.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): St. Mary's County, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

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