

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 120 (Harford County Senators)  
Judicial Proceedings

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Harford County - School Buses - Length of Operation

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This bill allows conventional school buses in Harford County to operate for 15 years, subject to specified requirements.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2015.

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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:** Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) finances are not substantially affected.

**Small Business Effect:** School bus contractors serving Harford County will not be substantially affected because HCPS does not anticipate substantial changes to its school bus replacement cycle.

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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 Calvert, Caroline, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, where it may be operated for up to 15 years *without* approval of the State Superintendent of Schools, if it meets applicable safety standards and maintenance standards described below.

Conventional school buses may be operated beyond the 12-year limit only 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 twelfth-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:** HCPS operates 382 school buses owned by contractors and 115 that are owned by the county. In fiscal 2013, Harford County spent \$35.3 million on student transportation, or an estimated \$939 per rider. Statewide, local school systems spent an average of \$792 per rider. Spending per rider for seven counties was above that for Harford County.

MSDE oversees approval of waivers from the 12-year limitation on the duration of school bus operation. HCPS submitted 42 waiver requests in the past school year. HCPS advises that its requests for waivers were granted and that presently 42 of its buses are over 12 years old.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** HCPS advises that because its waiver requests have been granted, the bill will not significantly affect the replacement cycle for school buses. The bill will remove the administrative tasks involved in seeking waivers and may marginally reduce inspection costs, but the fiscal effect is assumed to be minimal for HCPS.

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### Additional Information

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** HB 125 (Delegate McComas) - Environment and Transportation.

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

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 2, 2015  
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