



HB1226 VEHICLE LAWS - SCHOOL BUS SAFETY - OCCUPANT CAPACITY

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ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **HB1226 Vehicle Laws - School Bus Safety - Occupant Capacity** with amendments. This bill prohibits the number of pupils on a school bus from exceeding the seating capacity of the school bus.

It is clearly a best practice to not operate a school bus with students standing in an aisle. AACPS does not plan bus routes with standing students as it is our intent to have all students seated for the duration of each school bus ride. However, the explicit prohibition in this bill provides for two operational challenges. First, while AACPS does not intentionally program our buses with the need for students to stand in the aisle, ridership counts can fluctuate from year to year or within a year in unexpected fashions. Thus, there may be a period of time in which transported students may need to stand until such time as other student load balancing changes can be implemented and communicated by the Transportation Division. This takes some time and effort. Second, the literal interpretation of HB1226 could potentially leave students stranded at bus stops or at schools by a bus that has already reached its designated seating capacity with no other suitable solution for getting the students to or from school on a given day.

As such, AACPS requests that the bill be amended to better align the intent of the bill with the daily reality of managing a complex and dynamic public school bus transportation service. We propose that the bill be amended to allow for some short-term flexibility/time period for the Transportation Division to explore and effectuate any necessary school bus route adjustments to address the bus overcrowding. This will also allow the school system to communicate any changes with students and families.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on HB1226 with the proposed amendment.