

**Testimony of Laura Graham Booth  
Before the Environment and Transportation Committee**

**In Support of HB1226  
Vehicle Laws–School Bus Safety–Occupant Capacity**

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB1226. My name is Laura Graham Booth, and I serve as the Ward 7 representative to the Annapolis Education Commission. Our meetings are open to the public, and one subject that has been brought up repeatedly is overcrowding on public school buses. At our September meeting, one woman testified that she had called AACPS to report that there were not enough seats on her child's bus for all the students, and she was told that it was not against state law for students to stand in the aisles while the bus was in motion. To say we were flabbergasted would be a gross understatement.

Now, if I, as a parent, drive my children to school, I must adhere to the state laws regarding vehicle capacity (which is determined by the number of seatbelts in my vehicle), as well as the guidelines for car seats and booster seats. But if I put my same children on a school bus, apparently all of these reasonable and responsible safety measures are abandoned, and they are now permitted to stand while the bus is in motion if all of the available seats are taken. There is no legal obligation for the school system to find another bus to transport students who do not have a seat.

So I urge you to make our laws more consistent with regard to child safety and end the dangerous practice of permitting students to stand while the bus is in motion. Further, I urge you to set reasonable measurements for school bus capacity. In our discussions at the Annapolis Education Commission, we have heard that elementary school students may be expected to sit three to a seat, which does not provide enough capacity for older students, who are larger and frequently carry backpacks, lunchboxes, and musical instruments, etc.

Parents and taxpayers deserve to know that all reasonable precautions are being taken to protect the safety of our students while they are being transported to and from school.

Thank you.