

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Support of House Bill 1234
County Boards of Education – Student Transportation - Vehicles**

March 4, 2020

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners supports House Bill 1234 which authorizes a school board to provide transportation to and from school for certain students using a vehicle other than the currently approved Type I or Type II school vehicles. As an urban school district, Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) also has the vast majority of its students ride MTA, in addition to the Type I and Type II school vehicles.

City Schools currently faces significant challenges related to the limited availability of buses and bus staff in Baltimore City, neither of which are commensurate with the demand of transportation-eligible students. The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) transports hundreds of students by taxi because they are homeless or require transportation pursuant to their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). As a result, the district must contract with taxi cab companies as a means of supplementing our transportation options. City Schools also uses Type I and Type II vehicles approved to transport these students. Many times, when using the approved mode of transportation, the vehicle may carry fewer than 10 students. These modes of transportation are quite costly.

Our most serious and pressing concern, which is the driving force of this support, is the fact that at the start of the current school year the taxi cab companies with whom the school board contracts for services have begun refusing to transport students whose fares will generate less than \$15 due to the short radius of the student residence to school. Because of this decision by the taxi cab companies, nearly 175 City Schools students were without transportation.

The school district sought a waiver from the Maryland State Department of Education in September 2019 and was denied. Without the use of passenger vans, the district was left to seek to alleviate this problem by fitting more students on current bus routes, thereby increasing ride times.

Please note that in addition to seeking to address the specific challenges cited above, the use of passenger vans would also alleviate several other transportation challenges currently faced by the district. Specifically, given the unique transportation needs of our student population, use of passenger vans would assist with transporting homeless students to and from school, students who reside within a half-mile radius of their school, students with IEPs who require hearing and sight assessments, as well as students requiring transportation for athletic and cultural extracurriculars.

While the school system would need to hire additional FTEs to drive the alternate vehicles and/or hire more contractors, implicating a cost, the benefit outweighs the costs associated with implementing this legislation.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners supports House Bill 1234 and urges a favorable report.

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