



March 4, 2020

The Honorable Anne Kaiser and Members  
Ways and Means Committee  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: OPPOSE HB 1234 – County Boards of Education - Student Transportation - Vehicles**

Dear Chair Kaiser and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland School Bus Contractors Association (MSBCA) respectfully opposes HB 1234 – County Boards of Education - Student Transportation – Vehicles.

MSBCA serves as the voice of the private school bus companies that contract with local Maryland school systems in 18 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions to own and operate the nearly 3500 contracted school buses that transport schoolchildren across the State. MSBCA remains committed to the safety of the students they transport and considers it a privilege to do so. The Association also remains committed to the position that the yellow school bus is by far the safest mode of transporting children to and from school. School buses have been demonstrated as the safest mode of transportation for many years, thanks to the manufacturers' dedication to passenger safety and responsible school bus contractors and drivers.

There are 450,000 public school buses operating in the U.S., transporting 23.5 million minor students 4.3 billion miles annually. School buses are nearly 7 times safer in protecting passengers from motor vehicle related fatalities than other passenger vehicles. This is thanks to the school bus' tank-like exterior as well as the use of compartmentalization, which provides for passive protection for unbelted passengers. Passengers remain in compartments between the high backed, padded bus seats and, in the event of an accident, the seat backs absorb passenger crash energy.

In recent years, the use of passenger vans to transport children to and from school and school-related activities has become a significant issue. In an apparent effort to reduce transportation costs, some school districts across the nation have purchased or leased passenger vans and/or mini-vans in lieu of school buses. Passenger vans and mini-vans do not offer the same level of safety to occupants as a full-sized school bus or a school bus built on a van-type chassis. In a crash, the risk of a serious injury or fatality is significantly higher for the occupants of a van. Furthermore, since drivers of these vehicles are not required to possess a Commercial Drivers License, school districts may be able to bypass a number of state/local-mandated requirements. This is an alarming situation with potentially disastrous consequences.

Along with our colleagues at the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, MSBCA believes it is appropriate to require higher levels of safety in vehicles that transport children to and from school and school-related activities. Accordingly, we support the position that school children should be transported in

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school buses which provide the highest levels of safety, not in full-sized vans or mini-vans which do not meet the stringent school bus safety standards issued by the federal government and recommended by the National Conference on School Transportation, an organization of state school transportation officials.

As legislators, you are in the best position to ensure that vans or alternative vehicles of any size, both new and used, are not utilized in lieu of school buses. MSBCA urges you to oppose HB 1234. The bottom line is – students are safest in school buses.

Sincerely,

*Steve Nelson*

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