



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

BILL: HB 1234 - County Boards of Education - Student Transportation - Vehicles
DATE: March 4, 2020
POSITION: **Support**
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

This bill authorizes a county board of education to provide transportation for specified public school students using a vehicle other than a Type I or Type II school vehicle when a school bus cannot reasonably be provided. These students include (1) preschool students; (2) students receiving special education services; (3) homeless youth; (4) children in foster care; (5) students inaccessible to school buses; (6) students in a nonpublic school placement; (7) students in dual enrollment programs or work programs; or (8) other students on a written determination of the county board of education. The bill also broadens the definition of nonpublic school with respect to the transportation of students to include any elementary or secondary school in the State that is not part of the public school system.

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), which represents all twenty-four local school superintendents, **supports House Bill 1234.**

As indicated in the fiscal note, local school systems pay between \$448 per pupil in Frederick County, to over \$1,184 in Garrett County on transporting students. The current law requiring all school transportation via Type I and Type II vehicles or taxicabs does not adequately recognize the geographic diversity of our state. In most LEAs, these modes of transportation are sufficient, but for certain populations of student in more rural counties this requirement comes at a significant cost that could otherwise be invested in the classroom. This is a difficulty made worse by the national shortage of bus drivers.

While COMAR does allow for school systems to request a waiver from the State Superintendent of Schools to use alternate vehicles, those alternatives are only permitted in very limited circumstances. The fiscal note also indicates that the drivers of these vehicles would not receive a criminal background check, which is inaccurate. Any volunteer, contractor, or in this case, a driver of a non-Type I and Type II vehicle would be required to go through our fingerprint process and regular background check process.

This legislation would make other viable modes of transportation available to local school systems, allowing us to rededicate school bus drivers to cover full routes within our district and the flexibility to deal with the transportation needs special populations, especially our most vulnerable students. For the reasons stated above, PSSAM **supports House Bill 1234** and urges a favorable committee report.

One Voice, One Vision for Maryland's Students