March 3, 2020

SUPPORT HB1451: School Bus Purchasing – Zero-Emission Vehicle

Dear Chairwoman Kaiser, Chairman Barve and members of the Committees,

The above-signed organizations strongly urge your support of HB1451 and thank Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo for his leadership on this important matter.

Everyday over 626,000 children in Maryland take one of the approximately 7,200 diesel school buses to school in Maryland. Every year, school buses in Maryland travel more that 123 million miles[1]. Studies have shown that diesel pollutants concentrate inside a bus cabin, increasing children's exposure. A child riding inside of a diesel school bus may be exposed to as much as four times the level of toxic diesel exhaust as someone riding in a car[2]. Diesel emissions are filled with carcinogens, particulate matter and soot that increases lifetime risk of cancer, incidents of asthma and heart disease[3]. These effects are even more dangerous to children whose lungs, heart, and other organs are still developing.

In Maryland, approximately one in ten children suffer from asthma, and this rate is higher among minority groups.[4] Asthma is a leading chronic illness among children and in the United States and it's also one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.[5] In Maryland, 19.2 percent of parents reported that their child missed 1-2 days of school because of asthma during the past year and 9.7 percent said their child missed over seven days due to asthma.[6]
Children riding in zero emissions buses experience lowering exposure to air pollution, less pulmonary inflammation, more rapid lung growth over time, and reduced absenteeism compared to diesel buses, particularly among children with asthma.[7]

Zero emissions school buses also make economic sense for school districts. Although the upfront costs of zero emissions buses is higher than diesel buses, over the life span of a school bus, the lower cost of fuel and maintenance will save tens of thousands of dollars to school districts. The

[1] http://files.schoolbusfleet.com/stats/SBFFB18StateByState.pdf
[2] https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/schoolbus.pdf
[3] https://uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/National%20-%20Paying%20for%20Electric%20Buses.pdf
[4] https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/mch/Documents/Asthma%20in%20Maryland%202012.pdf
[5] https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/asthma/index.htm
[6] https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/mch/Documents/Asthma%20in%20Maryland%202012.pdf
[7] https://www.atsjournals.org/doi/10.1164/rccm.201410-1924OC

Twin Rivers Unified School District in California reports that their electric school buses cost about 75 percent less to fuel and 60 percent less to maintain.[8] This is money that school districts across Maryland could spend on academic programs. When you add the economic benefits of electric school buses to the health benefits from reducing particulate matter, CO_2 and NOx emissions, the case for electrifying school bus fleets in Maryland is very clear.

It is no longer acceptable to allow our children to in ride dirty diesel school buses when zero emissions clean electric school buses are readily available. Children have the right to breathe clean air and pursue a good education, and both are hindered by the effects of polluting buses. HB1451 creates a grant program to help school districts make the transition to clean, zero-emission buses, which is an important first step in the goal of reducing the exposure of Maryland's children to the harmful exposure of toxic diesel exhaust.

This bill that has real benefits for our children, communities, school districts, and the environment. We strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 1451.

[8] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/climate/electric-school-buses.html