

BILL: House Bill 1451
TITLE: School Bus Purchasing - Zero-Emission Vehicle - Requirement
DATE: March 4, 2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
Environment and Transportation Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 1451 because it would impose a costly mandate on all school systems by requiring each school bus purchased after October 1, 2023 to be a zero-emission vehicle.

Local boards of education place a very high priority on student transportation, including the substantial investment in school buses and drivers and maintenance staff. School systems also devote considerable resources to ensuring high standards for student safety relating to student transportation. Staff training is continuously ongoing whether for school system employed school bus drivers or drivers employed by school bus contractors. The high quality of student safety that these investments provide is MABE's top priority.

MABE does appreciate the action taken in 2019 to establish the Zero-Emission Vehicle School Bus Transition Grant Program within the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), a program intended to provide grants to local boards of education. However, MABE is troubled by this year's legislation proposing to mandate the statewide transition to zero emission school buses without a commensurate funding source to make such a transition possible.

As the Fiscal Note indicates, local school systems are clearly concerned with this legislation's dramatic impact on already challenged student transportation budgets. MABE recognizes that there may be the opportunity to develop purchase and financing arrangements that eliminate the higher initial procurement costs. However, such arrangements are not integral to this bill's approach. MABE looks forward to continued developments and advances in this area through pilot initiatives, but cannot at this time support legislation to institute a statewide zero emission school vehicle purchasing mandate by any set date.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1451.