

Testimony of Joanna Bache Tobin, Ph.D.
Before the Environment and Transportation Committee

In Support of HB87
Vehicle Laws—School Bus Safety—Occupant Capacity

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB87. My name is Joanna Bache Tobin. I am a parent of a member of the class of 2020 at Annapolis High School. I am also an educator and a member of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education representing the Annapolis area.

I am here today to urge you to support this bill. It is essential to secure the safety of our children as they ride buses to and from school and to school-related activities. Allowing children to stand or crouch on a moving bus is clearly not safe. Nor is it appropriate except in an emergency. Having a statute on the books that allows for our children to stand while a bus is moving speaks to a disregard not only for their safety, but also for their dignity as human beings. Our children deserve better from us.

The need for this bill first came to my attention when I heard a parent testifying before the Annapolis Education Commission say that when she had called the schools to complain that her child's bus was consistently overcrowded and students were forced to stand, the response was that the state law allowed children to stand on moving buses. I was able to bring this to former Delegate Alice Cain's attention, and she first introduced a bill to remediate the situation during last year's abbreviated legislative session. I am now very grateful to Delegate Jones for re-introducing this bill for the 2021 session.

Passing this bill is particularly important to the students in the Annapolis area. We are a largely urban district, with a dense population, and we also have significant areas of concentrated poverty. This means that we have a high number of students who depend entirely on bus transportation to get to and from school. It is therefore especially important that we ensure their transportation is safe and well regulated.

Let me conclude by saying that if you pass this bill, you will be sending a powerful message to our young people that we value them and their safety. As a parent and an educator one of the most important lessons I have learned is that children and students don't do what you say, they do what you do. In passing this legislation, we are not just saying that we care about our children's safety, and that they should too, we are putting our words into action.

Thank you.