

**Testimony of Laura Graham Booth
Before the Environment and Transportation Committee**

**In Support of HB87
Vehicle Laws–School Bus Safety–Occupant Capacity**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on HB87. My name is Laura Graham Booth, and I serve as the Ward 7 representative to the Annapolis Education Commission. One subject that has been brought to us repeatedly over the past several years is overcrowding on public school buses. At a meeting last year, one parent testified that she had called the Anne Arundel County Public Schools transportation department to report that there were not enough seats on her child's bus for all the students. The person she spoke to responded that it was not against state law for students to stand in the aisles while the bus was in motion. To say we were flabbergasted would be a gross understatement.

If I, as a parent, drive my children to school, I must adhere to the state laws regarding vehicle capacity and seat belt usage, as well as guidelines for car seats and booster seats. But if I put those same children on a school bus, apparently none of these reasonable and responsible safety measures apply. My son has been told by a bus driver to just "crouch down" when there are no empty seats. There is no legal obligation for school systems to find additional buses to transport students, and increasing transportation costs have caused school systems to turn a deaf ear to parental complaints such as these.

In the previous version of this bill which I testified on last year, there was no language that permitting standing on buses in case of emergency (such an evacuation due to a threat). While I agree that this may be necessary, I urge you to include specific language which states that it is only permissible in case of emergency and should not be used as justification to allow overcrowded buses to run under normal conditions.

I urge you to make our laws more consistent with regard to child safety. Please end this dangerous practice of permitting students to stand while the bus is in motion. Further, I urge you to set reasonable measurements for school bus capacity. In our discussions at the Annapolis Education Commission, we have heard that elementary school students may be expected to sit three to a seat, which does not provide enough capacity for older students, who are larger and frequently carry backpacks, lunchboxes, musical instruments, etc.

Parents and taxpayers deserve to know that all reasonable precautions are being taken to protect the safety of our students while they are being transported to and from school.

Thank you.