

**Testimony of Laura Graham Booth
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**In Support of SB253
Vehicle Laws—School Bus Safety—Occupant Capacity**

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.

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.

My only reservation regarding this bill is with regard to the language that permits standing on buses in case of emergency (such as a school evacuation). While I agree that this may be necessary, I urge you to modify the language to specifically state that this is only permissible in case of emergency, to prohibit this clause from being used as justification to allow overcrowded buses to run under normal conditions.

Further, I urge you to consider set specific measurements for school bus capacity. In our discussions at the Annapolis Education Commission, we have heard that students may be expected to sit three to a seat, which does not provide enough capacity for larger students or students who may also be carrying backpacks, lunchboxes, musical instruments, etc.

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. 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.