



March 3, 2021

**Testimony on HB 1055
Student Transportation- Transit Buses and Carpooling**

Position: Favorable

The Fund for Educational Excellence supports HB 1055, Student Transportation- Transit Buses and Carpooling.

Baltimore City Public Schools students are the only students in the State of Maryland who rely on MTA public transit to get to and from school. MTA buses and trains must get City Schools students to school safely and on time, just as students in other Maryland school districts are provided safe, reliable transportation to their schools. There are 29,000 Baltimore City Public School students, including 60% of high schoolers, using public transit to get to and from school. Baltimore City's transit systems have higher breakdown rates, less connectivity and lower reliability than the transit systems in most other major metropolitan areas. When considering this, it is likely not a coincidence that Baltimore City Public Schools students have a chronic absenteeism rate of 37%.

Frequent, reliable, and accessible transit is inextricably tied to the success of Baltimore's students and families, and yet access to transit in this city, like so many other things, is deeply inequitable, too often distributed along the expected lines of race and class.

School Choice was implemented in Baltimore City in 2005, and 16 years later has not reached its potential. Choice is designed to allow equitable access to quality schools for all students, allowing them to attend any public school within City limits. We have a system that families cannot take advantage of due to public transit deficiencies. This strategy cannot be effective if there is no robust transit system working in support of it.

School communities deserve to see tangible improvements in public transit accessibility, reliability, and efficiency. House Bill (HB1055) will increase the number of buses available to student commuters, ensuring more frequent service along the busiest routes. It also prioritizes hiring and retaining more operators and mechanics to run more frequent service on routes heavily used by students. It digitizes the student cards, removing unnecessary barriers that prevent students from attending school. We would like to see amendments to cover all middle and high school students and remove restrictions on days and hours for using their transit pass. It will also establish an incentive that encourages schools to promote carpooling and compensates families to transport students via carpool to reduce the capacity strain on buses.

School communities deserve to see tangible improvement in public transit access, reliability, and efficiency.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.



Sincerely,
Ruth Farfel

Ruth Farfel
Manager—Analysis and Engagement
Fund for Educational Excellence