

February 8, 2022



Committee: House Economic Matters Committee
Testimony: HB 696, Public Utilities - Electric School Bus Pilot Program
Position: FAVORABLE
Hearing Date: February 10, 2022

Dear Chairman Wilson and Members of the Committee:

The undersigned 28 groups strongly support HB696 and urge a favorable report.

HB0696 creates an Electric School Bus Pilot Program where school districts in each utility service area will be eligible to purchase zero-emission electric buses rather than diesel ones at no additional cost to the school districts. Investor-owned utilities may recover reasonable costs of the pilot program through a ratepayer adjustment. Each investor-owned utility that implements the program will provide rebates to

school districts for a minimum of 25 electric buses; the rebates are capped at \$50 million during the pilot program, which will run 3-5 years. The utility, in consultation with participating school districts, will provide annual reports on the environmental, health, and other costs and benefits of the program to the General Assembly, the Governor, and the Public Service Commission.

Every day over 650,000 children in Maryland ride to school on one of the State's approximately 7,200 diesel school buses. Every year, school buses in Maryland travel more than 128 million miles. Studies have shown that diesel pollutants concentrate inside a bus cabin, increasing children's exposure. A child riding inside of a diesel school bus may be exposed to as much as 15 times the level of toxic diesel exhaust as someone riding in a car. Diesel emissions are filled with carcinogens, particulate matter and soot that increases lifetime risk of cancer, incidents of asthma and heart disease. These effects are particularly dangerous for children because their lungs, heart, and other organs are still developing.

Children riding in zero-emission buses experience reduced exposure to air pollution, less pulmonary inflammation, more rapid lung growth over time and lower absenteeism compared to children riding in diesel buses, particularly those with asthma. In Maryland, approximately one in ten children suffer from asthma, and this rate is higher among minority groups. Asthma is a leading chronic illness among children in the United States, and it is also one of the leading causes of school absenteeism. In Maryland, 19.2 percent of parents reported that their child missed 1-2 days of school because of asthma and 9.7 percent said their child missed over seven days due to asthma.

Diesel school buses harm the environment in a number of ways. They are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, each bus emitting about 27 tons of CO₂ per year—6 times as much as an average car. Nitrogen oxide, a major constituent of diesel exhaust, contributes to acid rain, ozone formation and smog.

In the past, the high upfront cost of purchasing electric buses put them out of reach for many school districts. But costs have come down, and recent innovations, such as vehicle-to-grid (V2G) technology, coupled with the lower costs of operating and maintaining electric buses, have made them financially attractive for schools. One estimate puts the cost of operating electric school buses at about 19 cents per mile, compared to the 82 cents per mile cost of diesel buses.

V2G technology uses bus batteries to provide electricity to the grid when it is needed to stabilize imbalances and meet peak demands. School buses are ideally suited for this function, as they are equipped with very large batteries and only operate for small parts of the day. In the summer, when electricity demand is at its highest, most school buses do not operate at all.

Electric school buses are already being deployed in Maryland. Montgomery County, Frederick County, Howard County and Prince George's County already own, or plan to own, and operate electric school buses. School bus routes are typically less than 40 miles, whereas today's electric school buses can travel 120 miles or more on a single charge, which for some buses can be accomplished in only three hours.

HB696 provides the opportunity to expand the benefits of electric school buses to every school district in Maryland within the territory of an investor-owned utility. The program ensures there are no capital, administrative or operational costs to the school district. Rather, in addition to the substantial health

benefits of the buses, each participating school district can expect to see estimated cost savings of thousands of dollars per year per bus, dollars that can go to educational programs, teachers' salaries, and assistance to students.

HB696 is a no-lose proposition that would provide substantial health and educational benefits to Maryland's students and improve the environment for all of Maryland's communities.

The undersigned groups urge a favorable report on HB696.

Audubon Naturalist Society

Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate

Blue Water Baltimore

Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper

**Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Action Fund**

Victoria Venable, Maryland Director

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Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney

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Maryland League of Conservation Voters

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Cecilia Plante, Co-Chair

Maryland Sierra Club

Lindsey Mendelson, Transportation
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**Northeast Catholic Community Peace/Justice
Committee**

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Oncologists United for Climate and Health

Christine D. Berg, M.D., Bethesda, Maryland

**St Anthony of Padua, St Dominic & Most
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Rev. Ty Hullinger, Pastor

**Takoma Park Mobilization Environment
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Diana Younts, Co-Chair

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Robin Budish, Director

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**Unitarian Universalist Environmental Justice
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**Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of
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Phil Webster, Lead Advocate for Climate
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Monica O'Connor, Legislative Liaison