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**HB 753 – Primary and Secondary Schools- Bus Drivers Wages-Study
Ways and Means Committee
February 24th, 2022**

SUPPORT

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee, my name is John Clark proud school bus operator with Baltimore County Public Schools for the last twelve years and newly elected Vice President of AFSCME Local #434, representing AFSCME employees who support the critical infrastructure of our school system. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 753. This emergency bill requiring the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB) within the Maryland Department of Labor (MDL) to evaluate and report on the possibility of paying higher wages to school bus drivers in the State by July 1, 2022.

Our work helps to ensure that the school system lives up to its vision and goals, which we fully support. Our dedicated members push every day to raise the bar, close gaps, and prepare our students for a bright future. The pandemic has impacted nearly all elements of our lives and has only exacerbated the ongoing issues facing our members such as staffing shortage and the lack of a fair and livable wage by paying all employees at least \$15 hour and adjusting other salaries accordingly to meet the rising costs associated with the cost of living, inflation, and our changing economy.

The 2021-22 school year has been marked by severe transportation problems across US school districts and the bus driver shortages are getting worse, with some describing the situation as severe. But while school bus driver shortages are more pronounced than in years past, they are hardly new. Prior to the pandemic, staffing shortages were causing our members to do double-work. Why are US school systems plagued by chronic bus driver shortages? The reason isn't that there's a lack of jobseekers willing in theory to work as school bus drivers. It is the pay and benefits that are grossly inadequate with the incredibly challenging work that school transportation workers do to ensure the safety of our children to and from school.

We thank Delegate Jones for introducing HB 753 which begins the conversation of giving bus drivers in Maryland adequate compensation. We are looking forward to being a part of the conversation and we thank you for your time and look forward to working towards solutions to the ongoing challenges we face.

We ask for a favorable report on HB 753.

