



## Statement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689

SB 491– Charles County Board of Education - School Bus Contractor Employees - Negotiations  
February 22nd, 2023

**TO: The Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**FROM: Barry D. Wilson, Recording Secretary, ATU Local 689**

ATU Local 689 strongly supports SB491 and urges the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report. This bill would finally give school bus drivers and attendants a voice in their future— ending an era when Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) has been able to exclude workers from negotiations affecting their wages and working conditions.

At Local 689, we represent over 15,000 transit workers and retirees throughout the Washington DC Metro Area performing many skilled transportation crafts for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), MetroAccess, DASH, and DC Streetcar among others. Our union helped turn low-wage, exploitative transit jobs into transit careers. We became an engine for the middle-class of this region.

Today, in Charles County, the vast majority of school bus workers are employed by 17 private contractors hired by CCPS. The CCPS school bus system is fairly unique in this region, with most school systems either providing transportation in-house or with far fewer, but larger contractors. The Charles County School Bus Contractors Association (CCSBCA) was formed and registered to collectively represent the interests of these private companies in their negotiations with CCPS.

Unfortunately, in these negotiations, CCPS has set specific wage rate tables, benefit amounts and even specific workplace rules and regulations for the contracted workforce, all without the input and participation of employees. School bus workers and the unions that represent them should have a seat at the table for any negotiations that affect their wages and working conditions.

Nearly 200 school bus workers fought hard and overcame incredible pressure to form unions at 9 different school bus contractors. They joined ATU Local 689 because nearly 1000 of our members and retirees call Charles County their home. Still, when Local 689 negotiates with these school bus contractors they are very limited by their contracts with CCPS. This issue affects their ability to bargain about increasing wages, better benefits, and even some changes to workplace rules. CCPS acts like a "joint employer" but dodges the responsibilities that would come with that status.

SB 491 would solve these problems by finally labeling CCPS as a joint employer. Doing so would give workers' democratic and collective voice— their union – a seat at the table in annual negotiations with the school bus contractors association and allow for direct negotiations over workplace rules, wages, benefits, and a whole host of other policies being put forth by the county. In short, this is a bill that would give power back to working people in Charles County.

We thank Senator Jackson for continuing to fight for this important measure and urge the committee to issue a favorable report.