

Testimony for the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Monday, February 20th, 2023

**SB 491 – Charles County Board of Education - School Bus Contractor Employees -
Negotiations**

FAVORABLE with AMENDMENTS

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and committee members,

I write to you to express my support with amendments for Senate Bill 491 (SB 491). I am a grassroots activist in Charles County, fighting for the rights of working class residents.

For years Charles County bus drivers and attendants have transported our county's students to and from school, field trips, and activities, with a smile on their face. They have provided this essential service even though they are paid starvation wages, given subpar benefits, and treated with a total lack of respect.

Currently drivers and attendants wages are increased through a step program. In this program workers do not receive their first raise until 5 years of employment, leaving workers to borrow money from friends and family to pay for essentials such as; rent, utilities, childcare, groceries, and more. On top of being paid low wages, drivers and attendants are enrolled in a horrific retirement plan that equates to less than \$1,000 per year of working.

In 2022 drivers and attendants came together to unionize, in order to fight for increased wages, benefits, and to be treated with the respect they deserve. Even though they were successful in unionizing 10 lots they have been shut out of negotiations on master bus contracts, which dictate their pay and benefits.

In order for SB 491 to have the full impact the bill is intended to have, it must include specific language around who counts as a “representative” for the bus drivers and attendants. The bill should be amended to require the Charles County Board of Education to include all unions / collective bargaining units that represent contracted bus drivers and attendants in any negotiations over the master school bus contract. This legislation should also include a plan for binding arbitration, in the event the Charles County Board of Education and Charles County School Bus Contractors are acting in bad-faith during the negotiation process.

For the reasons stated above I urge the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to provide a favorable report, with the provided amendments, on Senate Bill 491.

Respectfully,

Carlos Childs