

Testimony for the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

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

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members,

I write to you to express my support for a Senate bill 491 (SB 491). I am a professional driver with a Maryland commercial license displaying an endorsement which qualifies me to drive a school bus transporting children. I transport up to sixty six (66) children per trip, to and from four different schools each school day.

I am employed by a private contractor, contracted by the Board of Education for the Charles County Public Schools to provide school bus transportation for students in Charles County. However, every aspect of my job is determined by the Charles County Board of Education. My compensation, benefits, retirement contribution and certification to drive a school bus in Charles County are determined and provided by the Charles County Board of Education. My private contractor only provides the bus, bus parking lot and distribution of the payroll checks from funds provided monthly by the Charles County Board of Education.

I have worked with no increase in pay for the last three and half years. The Charles County Board of Education only provides poverty wages, no holiday or vacation pay, no benefits and only requires the contractor to contribute \$8.00 a month to an investment savings account as a retirement contribution.

Starting over fifty years ago, the Charles County Board of Education promoted a system which allowed a few people to become millionaires, developing generational wealth for their businesses and families, while causing hundreds of bus drivers/attendants to only receive poverty wages. County employees were forced to leave their county positions, told that they would no longer be employed by the county. Instead, they became contracted employees for a small group of private contractors.

Bus driver & attendants working for private contractors comprise approximately 90% of the school bus drivers for the Charles County Board of Education. Contracted bus drivers and attendants have the same responsibilities and liabilities as county employees hired as bus drivers and attendants, but have no independent representation before the Charles County Board of Education.

This system which has been perpetuated by the Charles County Board of Education, school superintendents and contractors, has fostered a two-tier compensation system. Therefore,

contracted drivers and attendants receive no holiday or vacation pay and practically no benefits. In addition, unlike County employed Drivers & Attendants, who do receive holiday pay, vacation pay and a lifetime defined pension plan, contracted employees receive no real pension.

The reason why hundreds of children are now late to school in Charles County every day, is because the Charles County Board of Education does not provide compensation to attract or retain bus drivers and attendants to transport students timely for the start of school. Contracted Bus drivers are forced to pick up multiple routes daily because of a constant shortage of drivers, which is only getting worse.

After mounting frustration caused over a third of the Charles County bus drivers and attendants to call in sick, causing thousands of children to find another way to school, bus drivers and attendants choose to unite. Their efforts over the last 18 months has been to change the 50 year old system. With a united effort, they voted to become members of ATU Local 689 and negotiate directly with the Charles County Board of Education for their wages, benefits and retirement appropriations.

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

Respectfully,

Jerome Nedd