



Maryland Education Coalition



Ellie Mitchell & Rick Tyler, Jr. – Co-Chairs

Web site - www.marylandeducationcoalition.org

Email – md.education.coalition@gmail.com

February 8, 2024

HB0537: Income Tax - Credit for Nonpublic School Student Bus Transportation Expenses
House Ways and Means Committee
POSITION - UNFAVORABLE

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate, equitable policies, funding, and transparent accountability statewide for the estimated 900,000 students in Maryland's public schools, regardless of their academic, cultural, economic, geographic, racial, or other demographic status. We work to ensure that Maryland provides all public school students *"a thorough and efficient System of **Free Public Schools**; and shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance"* as defined in the Maryland Constitution, so all students are prepared to graduate college or career ready as defined in state and federal law. We believe this is also their civil right.

MEC also supports adequate, equitable investment of public money for public and approved private special needs schools only without discrimination, but **we strongly oppose the use** of any public operating or capital funds for vouchers, **tax credits, or tax subsidies for all other non-public, private, parochial, or home schools.**

We also believe the State must provide substantial support and base its grants on the current needs for and costs of providing adequate transportation, staffing, and training with safety and health as a priority for all eligible public-school children throughout Maryland.

State and local education agencies are not required to provide public school bus transportation for students enrolled in Public Charter Schools. Parents and guardians of thousands of public school students enrolled in public charter schools must transport or pay for private transportation services to get charter school students to and from school. These parents or guardians do not appear to be eligible for a dedicated tax break for transporting their students.

HB0537 if allowed to pass would lower the amount of revenue collected to fund public education including transportation costs for hundreds of thousands of public school student by providing a refundable credit against the State income tax for nonpublic school student bus transportation expenses paid by an individual resident who is the parent or guardian of the student during the taxable year.

In addition, many of our Maryland public school systems yearly struggle to hire, retain and pay competitive wages for many of our existing public school bus drivers, supervisors, and maintenance staff due to limitations in the resources available. Also, bus operation cost for fuel and maintenance has risen significantly.

There are a number of other reasons not mentioned above for why MEC opposes public fundings for non-public schools, including the lack of comparable assessments or academic performance reports such Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) and Maryland Integrated Science Assessments (MISA).

Therefore, MEC urges the Ways and Means Committee to find HB0537 unfavorable.