

**Maryland General Assembly
House Ways & Means Committee**

February 8, 2024

HB 537

FAVORABLE

Submitted by Judah Prero, Esq., Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and the members of the Ways & Means Committee, my name is Judah Prero, and I am a resident of Baltimore City who has been engaged in the practice of environmental law for over two decades. I have also worked together with schools and organizations in my community, including Agudah Maryland, Maryland CAPE, and others.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and look forward to additional opportunities to provide information to the Legislature on how the use of school buses can mitigate against traffic conditions that result in air pollution.

I speak today in support of House Bill 537 – concerning the credit for student bus transportation expenses. This bill is just one of a number of bills being heard today that look to incentivize actions that are beneficial to health and the environment.

This bill has personal significance to me. I have been involved in matters related to the environmental issues stemming from transportation for over a decade. Earlier in my career, I served as a Maryland State Assistant Attorney General both under Attorneys General Curran and Gansler. My client was the Maryland Department of the Environment, and I was the counsel for MDE's Mobile Source program in the Air and Radiation Management Administration – the division that deals with the air pollution impact of cars, trucks, buses - mobile sources. As a parent of ten children, I observed over the years how private school parents in the area of Baltimore in which I live spend considerable time on a daily basis carpooling or simply driving their own children to and from school. School buses have not been a viable option.

A large segment of the community in which I live in northwest Baltimore City and in the Pikesville area send their children to parochial schools. The main schools that service this community are generally not located within walking distance of the residences. Consequently, carpooling is routine for families with school-aged children. However, because of the large amount – and growing number - of children attending school, and the distance of the school from the residences, large numbers of full size and mini vans are on the road every day. The carpools travel on main arterial roads, such as Reisterstown Road and Park Heights Avenue, in the area of on- and off- ramps to the Baltimore Beltway, usually during rush hour periods. This creates a situation where the increased amount of vehicles on the roads simultaneously can lead to congestion, which results in slower moving cars and therefore a greater amount of tailpipe emissions. It appears that even with ridesharing/carpooling, the issue of traffic congestion which results in degraded air quality is apparent.

Observing this, I, along with community representatives, met with MDE's Mobile Source division to present some of the facts about the pupil transportation issue, specifically in the Pikesville/ Northwest Baltimore City area. The environmental professionals at MDE agreed that there was an air quality and congestion issue stemming from cars and vans being used for pupil transportation. Reducing the

amount of cars on the road, which would in turn relieve traffic congestions, would address this issue. That can be done through the use of school buses. I am sure this is not a situation unique to my area.

The reasons for why utilization of organized school buses posed a challenge in the past have been economic in nature – and, as others testifying today will explain, it is a challenge that can be addressed with the incentives contained in this bill. I want to emphatically express my belief that promoting mass pupil transit can have environmental and health benefits that accrue to all Marylanders. The expenditure is a worthwhile investment. Accordingly, it's my hope that the General Assembly passes House Bill 537.

Thank you for your consideration.