

March 2, 2025

The Honorable Senator Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB0468 (Benson) Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction  
**SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Feldman:

My name is Tim Ammon and I am writing you in an individual capacity. I have worked for more than 25 years as a consultant to the student transportation industry on matters of school start times and most recently on matters of later high school start times. While my organization takes no official position on the issue, I am writing in support of the effort as I believe the logistical and financial challenges, while real, are solvable in a way that is fiscally responsible while also doing what is in the best interest of children.

It is common to believe that the changes in start times will require a massive disruption to the transportation network and significant increases in transportation costs. Arguments are frequently made that it will be necessary to collapse highly efficient two- or three-tier systems to one tier structures that would dramatically increase the number of buses required at a time when driver shortages remain persistent. This belief is fundamentally incorrect and fails to recognize both the possibilities available and the impact of individual district choice on how services will be provided. What is true is that to have a complete and accurate assessment of transportation impacts it is necessary to clearly define and articulate the underlying constraints and variables associated with the routing solutions being proposed.

This opportunity for mitigation is most clearly demonstrated using the example of a real district where a disciplined and structured assessment of costs was conducted. Initial estimates, prior to any actual analysis, indicated that this district would experience a near doubling of transportation expenditures for in-district home-to-school students if healthier start times implemented. For this 80-bus school district, this would have equated to approximately \$2 million in additional expenditures. What this cursory analysis and associated estimate failed to recognize is the huge number of policy and operational choices districts have in designing transportation networks and the impact these choices have on actual costs.

After following a process that rigorously assessed and defined these choices, a total of 10 possible alternative start time scenarios and their associated transportation routing structures were analyzed. These analyses indicated that healthier start times could be implemented at a cost ranging from \$180,000 (approximately 2.5 percent) to \$1.6 million (23 percent) in additional expenditures depending solely on the combination of choices the district made about service provision. These options are significantly less than the near doubling of costs. While a sample of one district is not definitive, it is illustrative of the possibilities for cost control and mitigation when actual analysis is performed. The highly speculative estimates of both the logistical and financial impacts often associated with the debate on healthier start times are frequently lacking the necessary nuance and considerations that allow for accurate evaluations of likely impacts.

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As a professional who has worked in the transportation industry for more than 25 years it is clear that the assessments of transportation impact are overly dramatic. The definitive statement on the need to reduce or eliminate tiers in particular is clearly not a universal outcome and any policy analysis on the assessment of cost or logistical impact should not assume that requirement.

Healthier school start times will be beneficial to students across Maryland. Using transportation impacts as the rationale for opposing this measure ignores the overwhelming benefit potential and the options available to districts to mitigate any negative impacts. It is my strong professional and personal belief that the implementation of healthier school start times represents a unique opportunity to improve the lives of all school age children across Maryland and I strongly support SB0468.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Ammon", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Ammon

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