



**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Ways & Means Committee
March 6, 2025**

HB1359: UNFAVORABLE

Charles County - Student Bus Transportation Providers - Provider Displacement

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Charles County - Student Bus Transportation Providers - Provider Displacement** for the potential implications for other local school systems who use external bus contractors.

HB1359 is a local bill for the Charles County Public School System that sets an untenable precedent for all school systems in Maryland and contracting of public services in general. Specifically, the bill requires that before taking any action that results in the displacement of a person that has been providing student bus transportation services in Charles County, the local board of education must provide notice of the intent to displace persons providing that service in Charles County at least ten years in advance, and at least five years in advance hold at least one public hearing with notice of the hearing published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county one per week for two successive weeks before the hearing. The bill defines "displacement" as the provision of student bus transportation services by the Charles County Board of Education that precludes a private person that has been providing the services and is licensed and certified to provide the services from continuing to provide the services. Circumstances that would not constitute displacement include when the local board does not renew a contract and at the end of the contract term contracts with another person to provide the service, or the person providing the student bus transportation services has acted in a manner threatening to public health or safety, has committed a breach of contract, or refuses to continue to provide services under the terms and conditions of an existing agreement.

In Howard County, student bus transportation is currently provided entirely by private bus contractors. For FY25, the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) serves nearly 40,000 general education students with close to 500 transportation buses. Additional services for students with disabilities and those traveling to non-public placements include over 50 alternative vehicles as well, also largely provided by outside contractors. As transportation costs continue to increase, local school systems need the flexibility to determine if contracting, in-house, or a combination of both are the best fit based on budgetary constraints, availability of drivers, and other operational considerations.

Beyond the unknowns in terms of planning for school bus operations ten years into the future, if passed SB0727 has the potential to stifle competitive contracting. Private bus companies would no longer have to compete with other potentially cost-effective alternatives, driving up public costs at the expense of other school system priorities. Transportation services should not be hamstrung to a ten or even five year limitations to protect existing vendors at the expense of innovation, taking advantage of technological improvements in routing, and exercising options in energy efficiency, or even change their delivery model or area of provided transportation. This bill could potentially inhibit all of these and more.

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Furthermore, school systems need to be able to professionally manage performance and make adjustments to contracts based on performance in accordance with the expectations set in the bid. As written, the proposed legislation could supersede what a local board of education has in their contract with the provider. In any contracting, whether for buses or other services used by government agencies, giving a vendor this advantage is bad public policy.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on SB0727 from this Committee.