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Legislative District 28
Charles County

Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Local Revenues

Chair, Racing and Gaming

Chair, Southern Maryland
House Delegation



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB1359
Charles County – Student Bus Transportation Providers – Provider Displacement

Good Afternoon, Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins and Members of the Ways and Means Committee. I'm Delegate Edith Patterson representing the District 28 Delegation regarding our support of HB1359 - Charles County – Student Bus Transportation Providers – Provider Displacement.

This legislation supports the Charles County School Bus Contractors Association (CCSBCA), which includes 24 small local businesses, predominantly women and minority-owned, that operate 315 buses, employ more than 400 drivers, attendants, and support staff, and serve more than 28,000 K-12 students and their families.

In September of 2024, their proposed legislation was presented to the Charles County Board of Commissioners for consideration. This legislation was approved by the County Commissioners and moved forward to the Charles County Legislative Delegation. HB1359 is being sponsored by the Charles County Delegation.

As a life-long educator in Charles County, I have known many of these families who own the 24 student bus companies, also referred to as contractors, for decades and have watched them grow and serve the county and the school system in efficient ways employing safe transportation.

Many of these businesses have ownership that spans 2 to 3 family generations – these are generational small businesses. And this is all they do so that the school system can focus on learning and student achievement and equity.

HB1359 specifically addresses the requirement for the Charles County Public Schools to give a “notice of displacement” to our Charles County Bus Contractors and to the public should the school system decide to handle student transportation in another way besides outsourcing to these companies.

This bill will ensure “fair notification— of at least 6 years—before termination that results in the displacement of a contractor”. The bill includes provisions for non-performance, as does their contract so that is not an issue here.

All bus contractors purchase and assume personal debt for their buses over a 6-year or longer period of time with the banks. They go into debt at \$150,000 per bus with reimbursement over several years by the school system.

Over the past four years, CCPS significantly increased its own school bus fleet from 22 to 69, making it publicly known that they plan to bring services in-house at some time in the future but they have not been transparent with the plans. This has raised major concerns with the 24 bus contractors.

This bill allows notice and time to plan for the future not only for the contractors, but for their 400 employees. The requested 6-year notice aligns with neighboring counties that operate by way of school bus contractors. Calvert and St Mary's have 12-year contracts with Calvert renewing at the 6th year as well as nonperformance clauses.

A similar bill was passed into legislation in 2017 requiring notice be given to Charles County trash collectors. This is a similar situation of large personal financial investments and the lack of partnership and goodwill. A school bus once purchased can only be used to transport school children.

The contractors have never been able to negotiate any job security in their contract and that is why it has landed here.

This bill has the support of the MD School Bus Contractor Association and its President Mr. Steve Nelson, and the Charles County Chamber of Commerce, and parents.

HB1539 provides Displacement notice to the Contractors and to the public. Such notice to small local businesses that have diligently served Charles County for 100 years is a matter of fairness and equity and good business practice.

I respectfully ask for a favorable vote for HB1539.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edith Patterson
Charles County