

February 25, 2026

Support with Amendments for Senate Bill 292

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of HopSkipDrive, I am writing to express our **strong support for SB 292**, with the attached amendments. While we fully support repealing the termination date for the use of alternative vehicles, we propose an amendment to optimize student transportation. This change will empower county boards to more effectively combat chronic absenteeism, navigate bus driver shortages, and reduce excessive commute times for Maryland's most vulnerable students.

Since HopSkipDrive started in 2014 by three working moms, we have completed over 5 million rides, across 95 million miles to date supplementing school buses and existing transportation options by connecting kids to highly-vetted caregivers on wheels, such as grandparents, babysitters, and nurses in local communities. **We have since supported over 13,500 schools, partnering with nearly 1,300 school districts, government agencies, and nonprofit partners across 21 states.**

Proposed Amendment: Enhancing Flexibility & Efficiency

HopSkipDrive proposes to explicitly allow schools to partner with PSC-regulated providers using "multi-rider" configurations, up to 2 riders. Current interpretations of regulations limit Public Service Commission (PSC)-regulated carriers using non-taxi small vehicles to only one rider. This restriction makes it difficult for schools to use private contractors effectively, even for simple tasks like transporting siblings together. This amendment would allow a PSC-regulated provider to use a single SUV or sedan to transport up to 2 students on a single route. It ensures that students such as those in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or students with disabilities can get to class reliably and on time.

Key Provisions of the Amendment:

- **Gold-Standard Safety:** All drivers must meet the rigorous background check standards of § 6-113.2 (the "direct contact with minors" standard), including State and FBI fingerprinting. There is zero compromise on student safety.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Explicitly permitting multi-rider trips (up to 2 students) reduces the number of cars on the road, would create efficiency by allowing siblings or small clusters of neighbors to be transported together, and cuts costs for county school boards.
- **Capacity & Compliance:** Vehicles shall be designed to seat not more than 10 individuals (including the driver), aligning with current COMAR alternative vehicle requirements. Drivers transporting more than two students would be subject to COMAR alternative vehicle requirements.
- **Local Control:** County boards have the authority to impose additional requirements on service providers through the contracting process.

We are grateful for Senator Bailey's efforts to ensure school boards maintain their authority to utilize alternative vehicles for student transportation and appreciate the committee's thoughtful consideration of the bill. By adopting these small but impactful amendments, Maryland can create a more agile, modern, and cost-effective transportation network for its students.

Sincerely,
Lauren Hulse
Sr. Manager Government and Legislative Affairs