

JACK BAILEY
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Calvert and St. Mary's Counties

Budget & Taxation Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Senate Bill 292 - County Boards of Education - Student Transportation - Sunset Repeal

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to introduce Senate Bill 292. This bill would make permanent provisions of law that the General Assembly passed in 2021 that created a framework allowing local school systems to use alternative forms of transportation for certain groups of students for which it would be infeasible or impractical to use traditional school buses.

The 2021 law allowed local school systems to use alternative forms of transportation for pre-school age students, students with disabilities, homeless youth, children in foster care, students without access to school buses, students in a nonpublic school placement, students in dual enrollment programs, work programs or other educational programs based outside of the school campus. The law also allowed local school systems to provide alternative forms of transportation through a written determination by the county board of education. Under this law, the drivers of these vehicles are included in the provisions of law requiring background checks for individuals who have direct contact with minors and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has adopted regulations establishing minimum vehicle and driver safety standards for these vehicles.

The law included a sunset that will go into effect on June 30, 2026, if the General Assembly does not act on this issue this year. As part of the evaluation of the law, MSDE submitted a report in December which I have attached to this testimony. In the report, MSDE outlined how school systems have benefited from this law, particularly those districts in rural counties like the ones that I represent. The report states that "rather than undermining contracted school bus drivers or small transportation businesses, the continued use of alternative school vehicles under SB448 and HB72 enhances Maryland's transportation framework," and that continued use of these alternative school vehicles "is not only a practical solution—it is a necessary evolution in Maryland's approach to equitable student transportation. These legislative measures have empowered county boards to address longstanding logistical challenges, especially in rural, geographically dispersed, or underserved communities where traditional school buses are not always feasible." The report also includes information provided by school systems on how they have used these alternative vehicles.

I have submitted with this bill an amendment to add a required review of current regulations that was amended on to the House version of this legislation. Senate Bill 292 will allow our local school systems to continue to have flexibility in student transportation, which has helped them in their mission to serve all Maryland students. Therefore, I respectfully request a favorable report with this amendment on Senate Bill 292. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Bailey".

Senator Jack Bailey