



**State of Maryland**  
**Department of State Police**  
Government Affairs Unit  
Annapolis Office (410) 260-6100

**POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**DATE:** March 17, 2026

**BILL NUMBER:** Senate Bill 968

**POSITION:** Oppose

**BILL TITLE:** Education – School Bus – Fire Safety Standards

**REVIEW AND ANALYSIS**

This legislation seeks to remove a Maryland law requiring school buses to meet the fire block test for seat upholstery, a specific national fire safety standard established by the National Congress on School Transportation (NCST).

Under current law, school buses must be constructed with materials that meet the school bus seat upholstery fire block test established by the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures adopted by the National Congress on School Transportation.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), an integral part of the Maryland Department of State Police (MDSP), has major concerns about Senate Bill 968. This legislation repeals that requirement. As a result, Maryland law would no longer require school buses to meet this national seat upholstery fire safety test. Instead, the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) would retain general authority to adopt regulations promoting school bus fire safety standards.

The fire block test provides a critical defense for high-risk populations, including children and students with disabilities. These passengers often lack the physical or developmental capability for rapid self-preservation during a fire. Seat upholstery accounts for one of the largest fuel loads in a school bus cabin. When seat materials are not fire-rated, a small ignition source can lead to rapid fire spread and the production of toxic smoke. By requiring materials that pass the fire block test, Maryland ensures that seat cushions resist ignition and significantly slow the growth of a fire. This passive fire protection provides the necessary time for passengers to evacuate before a cabin becomes untenable.

The 17th NCST updated the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures manual in September 2025. These updates reinforce the importance of enhanced fire-blocking materials to prevent flames and toxic gases from entering the passenger compartment. The fire block test is the primary mechanism to verify that these materials perform as intended under emergency conditions. Repealing the mandate to follow these national procedures would disconnect Maryland from these vital safety advancements specifically designed to prevent catastrophic cabin fires.

Standardized fire block testing remains the benchmark for protecting vulnerable citizens during transportation. Maintaining this specific requirement is essential to the safety of Maryland students and to ensuring that Maryland school buses continue to meet these life-saving criteria.

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The Maryland Department of State Police understands that amendments may be submitted to modify the bill as currently written. If the proposed amendments address the concerns raised by the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the Department will withdraw its opposition. However, if the bill remains unchanged, the Maryland Department of State Police will oppose the legislation as written. We respectfully ask that you consider this letter as you deliberate on Senate Bill 968.