



Statement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689
SB 574 –Charles County – Student Bus Transportation Providers – Provider Displacement
March 11th, 2026
Unfavorable

TO: The Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Matthew Girardi, Political & Communications Director, ATU Local 689

As I wrote last year, SB 574 is of great interest to ATU Local 689, however, this time, the Union strongly urges the Education, Energy and the Environment Appropriations Committee to vote against this bill. As committee members may remember, last year, Charles County's Senate Delegation also brought this bill to you and we were assured that the bill's intent was around protecting jobs. In response, we added a number of commonsense changes to center the bill around workers, not a few contracting companies and their owners. None of those were reflected nor do we now believe there was any intent to. Passing this bill would stifle progress for workers, parents, and our young scholars in Charles County. It must not pass.

At Local 689, we represent over 15,000 transit workers and retirees throughout the Washington DC Metro Area performing many skilled transportation crafts for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), MetroAccess, Charles County School Bus, DASH, and DC Streetcar among others. Our union helped turn low-wage, exploitative transit jobs into transit careers. We became an engine for the middle-class of this region.

Today, in Charles County, the vast majority of school bus workers are employed by 17 private contractors hired by CCPS. The CCPS school bus system is fairly unique in this region, with most school systems either providing transportation in-house or with far fewer, but larger contractors. The Charles County School Bus Contractors Association (CCSBCA) was formed and registered to collectively represent the interests of these private companies in their negotiations with CCPS.

Unfortunately, in these negotiations, CCPS has set specific wage rate tables, benefit amounts and even specific workplace rules and regulations for the contracted workforce, all without the input and participation of employees. School bus workers and the unions that represent them have not had a meaningful seat at the table for any negotiations that affect their wages and working conditions.

Nearly 200 school bus workers fought hard and overcame incredible pressure to form unions at 9 different school bus contractors. They joined ATU Local 689 because nearly 1000 of our members and retirees call Charles County their home. Still, any true negotiations have been largely lacking with many contractors, years later.

Let us be clear: contractors must not be allowed to keep wages low, provide inadequate benefits, keep out unions, and then claim their workers' livelihoods are their priority in an attempt to prevent those jobs from being brought in-house by CCPS. Due to this, we believe that SB 574 as presently constructed should not go through.

The contractors of the CCSBCA understandably want to avoid bus services being brought in-house so they can preserve the status quo. However, that status quo is and has been unacceptable for the people they employ. If the

purpose of this bill is truly to enhance job security and dignity, Local 689 urges substantial amendment to ensure that this body passes a bill that is truly protective of jobs that provide living wages, fair benefits, and dignity to each and every worker.

Specifically, we gladly offer this committee two alternative routes to improve this bill. The first way would be to mandate that any jobs protected in this bill would only apply to contractors who have recognized the Union and concluded their first collective bargaining agreement. The second would be by mandating that any jobs at CCPS in-house bus services would have to give first priority in hiring to any former school bus contractor worker and that their previous years of service would be honored by CCPS. Either would accomplish the stated goals of protecting Charles County school bus drivers in their drive for job security and dignity. Without them, the Union is highly skeptical of the bill.

The Union thanks this committee for considering our views and urges this committee to vote down SB 574.