

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dr. Myriam Rogers ♦ Superintendent ♦ 6901 North Charles Street ♦ Towson, MD ♦ 21204

March 27, 2026

Position- Favorable

RE: Senate Bill 968

I am writing to express our support for SB0968. I currently oversee a fleet of approximately 1,000 school buses serving Baltimore County Public Schools, including both publicly owned and contracted vehicles. I also serve as the Fleet Representative for the Maryland Association of Pupil Transportation and as a member of the MDOT MVA School Vehicle Advisory Committee.

With prior experience as the Manager of School Vehicle Safety for the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration, as well as an Authorized Maryland State Inspector in the Private Sector, I have dedicated my career to vehicle safety, inspections, and regulatory compliance primarily within the school transportation industry.

Based on this experience, I find the current requirement mandating fire-block material for operator (driver) seats to be arbitrary and inconsistent with national standards. I respectfully recommend that this requirement be revised to make the use of fire-block material for operator seats optional.

Currently, Maryland requires that operator seats on Type I school buses be covered with fire-block material. This is not fully consistent with the standards established by the National Congress on School Transportation (NCST), which Maryland statute references for school bus construction and safety.

The NCST recommendations clearly apply the School Bus Seat Upholstery Fire Block Test specifically to **passenger seating and restraining barriers**, not to the operator's seat. This distinction reflects both the design intent and safety priorities established at the national level. Additionally, Maryland's own regulations for **Type II school vehicles** do not require fire-block material for operator seats, creating an inconsistency within the State's regulatory framework. Allowing operator seats to be constructed of non-fire-block material consistent with NCST standards would:

- Align Maryland regulations with nationally recognized school transportation safety specifications;
- Eliminate inconsistencies between Type I and Type II school vehicle requirements;
- Aid in driver comfort and minimize the desire to install aftermarket seat covers or sit on alternative material such as towels, pads, etc. which negate the Fire Block Material;
- Maintain compliance with federal safety standards, including FMVSS No. 222.

Importantly, this change would not reduce safety protections for students, as all passenger seating would continue to meet stringent fire-block testing requirements already mandated by both State law and national standards.

We respectfully request your consideration in supporting legislative change to clarify that fire-block material requirements apply to passenger seating and barriers, consistent with NCST guidance, and not to operator seats.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and for your continued support of safe and effective school transportation in Maryland. We would be happy to provide any additional information or technical clarification as needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Groff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Mr. Michael Groff
Senior Fleet Supervisor
Department of Transportation
Baltimore County Public Schools