

March 27, 2026

Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee  
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee

**RE: Support for Senate Bill 968 to Amend Fire Safety Standards for School Buses**

Dear Chair Korman, Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Guyton, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of International Motors, LLC (International), a leading North American manufacturer of commercial trucks and school buses, we appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter of support for Senate Bill 968. This bill, as amended on March 20, would exempt the driver's seat of a school bus from the requirement that a school bus be constructed with certain materials that enable it to meet all the criteria of the school bus seat upholstery fire block test established by the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures (NSTSP) specifications and procedures adopted by the National Congress on School Transportation.

**BACKGROUND ON INTERNATIONAL MOTORS**

International produces International® brand class 4-8 commercial trucks and IC Bus® brand school and commercial buses, as well as commercial vehicle engines and parts.

We are the country's leading school bus manufacturer, with over 13,500 buses sold in 2025.<sup>1</sup> Our school buses are manufactured in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and last year we celebrated the 250,000<sup>th</sup> school bus produced at the Tulsa Bus Plant. Today, over 40% of the approximately 500,000 school buses on the road in the U.S. and Canada are an IC Bus.<sup>2</sup>



**CORRECTING A TECHNICAL MISALIGNMENT**

The fire safety standards referenced in Section 7–808 (b) of the Maryland state statutes were adopted from the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures (NSTSP). It is important to note that the National Congress on School Transportation developed these specific "Fire Block" tests only for passenger seating. The 2025 NSTSP provides that “passenger seats shall be constructed with materials that enable

<sup>1</sup> See [TRATON 2025 Annual Report](#) at page 50.

<sup>2</sup> See [250,000 Bus Announcement](#)

them to meet the criteria of the School Bus Seat Upholstery Fire Block Test.”<sup>3</sup> Further, the fire block test procedures indicate that it is to be performed on the passenger seats only.<sup>4</sup>

The test criteria are optimized for the materials and surface areas of high-back passenger benches, not the complex mechanical and ergonomic structure of a driver’s seat. Maryland is currently one of only a handful of states that applies this passenger-specific test to the driver’s seat. The standards in the NSTSP which apply to the driver’s seat do not include any language regarding the seat upholstery fire block test.<sup>5</sup>

To be clear, we fully support maintaining the highest fire block standards for the passenger seats. However, applying these same requirements to the driver’s seat limits the availability of high-quality, ergonomic seating options. Fire-block upholstery is often rigid and lacks the breathability and flexibility of premium synthetic fabrics.

Since school bus drivers spend hours behind the wheel, providing more comfortable seating options improves driver comfort, reduces fatigue, and aids in the recruitment and retention of qualified drivers. The active safety benefit of a comfortable, alert driver likely outweighs the nominal fire-retardant benefit of using upholstery that was never intended for this specific seat type.

## **CONCLUSION**

This bill does not lower the safety standards of our school buses; rather, it ensures that Maryland’s regulations are aligned with industry standards and practically applied. By exempting the driver’s seat from a test intended for passenger benches, Maryland can provide its drivers with better equipment without compromising the safety of the students on board.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the committee report SB 968 favorably for passage.

Sincerely,



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<sup>3</sup> See [2025 NSTSP](#) at page 70.

<sup>4</sup> See [2025 NSTSP](#) at pages 374-76.

<sup>5</sup> See [2025 NSTSP](#) at page 71.