



HB0319 – COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT TRANSPORTATION – SUNSET REPEAL

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WAYS AND MEANS

SUPPORT

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **HB0319 – County Boards of Education – Student Transportation – Sunset Repeal**. This bill repeals the termination date of State law authorizing county boards of education to provide transportation to and from using a vehicle other than a Type I or Type II school vehicle when a school vehicle cannot reasonably be provided for the following public school students: (1) preschool-age students; (2) students with disabilities; (3) homeless youth; (4) children in foster care; (5) students without access to school buses; (6) students in a nonpublic school placement; or (7) students in dual enrollment programs, work programs, or other educational programs based off the school campus. Per existing law, with the written approval of the county board, transportation may be provided using a vehicle other than a Type I or Type II school vehicle to other student groups not specified in the statute.

Local boards of education are responsible for providing funding for the transportation of students within their school systems. Over the years, local school systems' responsibilities for transporting students have significantly increased due to additional costs associated with transporting special education, nonpublic placement, and homeless students. Operational expenses associated with fuel costs and labor shortages have also contributed to increased expenditures. Although the State provides some funding for transportation, this funding does not increase sufficiently from year to year to cover increasing enrollments as well as the increasing costs of obtaining and maintaining school buses.

AACPS supports legislation that increases a local school system's flexibility with respect to permissible vehicles used to transport public school students. Under the current law, AACPS established an alternative vehicle program which has been extremely successful. Like many school systems nationwide, AACPS experienced a shortage of qualified bus drivers during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in disrupted transportation services. The flexibility to use vehicles other than Type I or Type II school vehicles allows AACPS to improve transportation services for students and families. AACPS currently operates 56 vans to provide transportation to students experiencing homelessness and students in nonpublic placements. Allowing this flexibility in statute to terminate would require AACPS to replace our fleet of vans with school buses at an estimated cost of \$5 million and replace our current alternative school vehicle drivers with CDL certified bus drivers.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on HB0319.