

Support for Senate Bill 292

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

On behalf of HopSkipDrive, I am writing to express our **strong support for SB 292**, as amended by the Senate. We are pleased that the Senate passed the bill with the amendments we coordinated with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and we respectfully urge the Committee to advance the bill with those amendments intact.

Since HopSkipDrive was founded in 2014 by three working moms, we have completed over 5 million rides across 95 million miles, supplementing school buses and existing transportation options by connecting kids to highly-vetted caregivers on wheels – such as grandparents, babysitters, and nurses in local communities. We have supported over 13,500 schools, partnering with nearly 1,300 school districts, government agencies, and nonprofit partners across 21 states, and our 2025 Safety Report showed that 99.7% of rides were completed without a safety incident of any kind.

The Senate Amendments: Enhancing Flexibility, Efficiency & Safety

The Senate amendments, developed in coordination with MSDE, explicitly allow county boards to contract with Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) to transport up to two students simultaneously, without being subject to MSDE's alternative vehicle regulations. This addresses a practical gap in current law: non-taxi small vehicles are limited to only one rider at a time, making it difficult for schools to use other PSC-regulated private contractors effectively – even for straightforward situations like transporting siblings together. The amendments include the following key provisions:

- **Gold-Standard Safety:** All TNC drivers must satisfy the rigorous background check standards of § 6-113.2 (the "direct contact with minors" standard), including both State and FBI fingerprint-based criminal history records checks. There is no compromise on student safety.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Permitting multi-rider trips of up to two students reduces the number of vehicles on the road, creates efficiencies for siblings or small clusters of neighboring students, and reduces costs for county school boards.
- **Capacity & Compliance:** Vehicles must be designed to seat no more than 10 individuals, including the driver, consistent with current COMAR alternative vehicle requirements. Drivers transporting more than two students remain subject to those COMAR requirements.
- **Local Control:** County boards retain full authority to impose additional requirements on TNC providers through the contracting process.
- **Sunset Aligned with Regulatory Action:** The multi-rider provision is designed to remain in effect only until MSDE amends its alternative vehicle regulations to address this use case, at which point it is automatically abrogated – ensuring the General Assembly and MSDE remain in alignment.

These amendments ensure that students in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or living with disabilities can get to school reliably and on time, while giving county boards a practical, cost-effective tool to address transportation gaps. We are grateful for Senator Bailey's leadership on this bill and for MSDE's collaboration in developing the Senate amendments. We respectfully urge the committee to advance SB 292 with the Senate amendments as passed.

Sincerely,

Lauren Hulse
Sr. Manager Government and Legislative Affairs