



February 9, 2026

## Support with Amendments for House Bill 319

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

My name is Lauren Hulse, and I am writing to share the support of HopSkipDrive for HB319 with amendments that are attached. It is a great benefit to schools to have the authority to use alternative vehicles to supplement existing options to transport students, and we support repealing the termination date of the laws that allow school boards to do so. However, we propose amendments to HB319 that would create a more flexible, safe, and accountable student transportation system, and will assist county boards with chronic absenteeism, bus driver shortages, and unnecessary long commutes.

Since HopSkipDrive started in 2014 by three working moms, we have completed over 5 million rides, across 95 million miles to date 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 since supported over 13,500 schools, partnering with nearly 1,300 school districts, government agencies, and nonprofit partners.

### Overview of Proposed Amendments

HopSkipDrive proposes to amend the bill beyond a simple extension of current authority, and proposes to codify a statutory baseline framework for alternative student transportation, which should include annual mandatory vehicle inspections, a minimum driver age, drug testing, satisfactory background checks, enrollment in a driver record monitoring system, and specific training on topics such as defensive driving and child safety. The Department of Education would be tasked with establishing criminal conduct and driving record disqualifications.

### Reasons Amendments are Necessary

This bill would codify specific standards to address current regulatory inconsistencies and practical challenges:

- **Increase student transportation options:** The state's current system is plagued by challenges, including a lack of available bus drivers and complex bus routes that result in long commute times. This crisis has fueled high rates of chronic absenteeism, reaching a startling 30% statewide. Current COMAR regulations prevent innovative, safe options from operating in Maryland that would help alleviate these issues.
- **Standards for smaller vehicles:** Current COMAR regulations impose bus-like requirements - such as back-up warning alarms and behind the wheel instruction - on alternative vehicles. Instead, standards should ensure safety that matches the type of vehicle while still making sure schools can fill gaps that buses can't.
- **Ensuring consistent baseline safety standards:** The COMAR regulations exempt taxis and alternative vehicles only transporting one rider. This has created confusion and inconsistencies. There are no requirements for a vehicle transporting only one rider and there are other carriers that are also regulated by the Public Service Commission that are subject to the COMAR requirements, such as transportation network companies designed specifically to transport youth passengers.

Codifying statutory baseline standards would ensure that safety requirements are rigorous but appropriate for the vehicle type, and would ensure that every driver that is providing transportation services to students meets the baseline requirements. Additionally, schools would be able to impose any additional standards above the baseline requirements through the contracting process with providers.

We are grateful for Delegate Sample-Hughes' efforts to ensure school boards maintain their authority to utilize alternative vehicles for student transportation and appreciate the committee's thoughtful consideration of the bill.

Sincerely,

Lauren Hulse  
Sr. Government Relations Manager