



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Steven D. Rhoads

New York State Senators, Assembly Members, Fire Safety, & School Officials Host Press Conference Addressing NYS Emission-Free School Bus Mandate

STEVEN D. RHOADS February 25, 2024



New York State Senators, Assembly Members, Fire Safety, & School Officials from across Long Island rallied at the Levittown Bus Depot with one unifying message: Pump the Brakes on New York's School Bus Mandate.

Early this morning New York State Senators, Assembly Members, Fire Safety, & School Officials joined together to “Pump the Brakes” on New York State’s fast-paced electric school bus mandate to ensure its feasibility and affordability for all communities. The impending 2027 statewide electric school bus mandate raises concerns about financial strain on school

districts and taxpayers as well as safety concerns.

New York's 2022-23 budget set a mandate requiring all new buses sold in the state to be zero-emission by 2027 and all buses on the road be zero-emission by 2035. While the group applauded efforts to reduce emissions and create a cleaner environment for our children, they raised concern that the current approach is flawed and lacks the necessary consideration for the potential consequences. A new, full-size electric bus costs \$400,000 - \$450,000 - triple the price of a conventional bus which is approximately \$130,000. With 45,000 school buses in the state, full conversion by 2035 will cost approximately \$20 billion. The cost over and above what school districts already pay for replacement buses is projected to cost between \$8 billion and \$15 billion statewide. The State's mandate will place a heavy burden on school districts and hardworking taxpayers.

This school bus mandate is happening at the same time the Governor has proposed to change the foundation aid formula and the hold harmless provision, which would reduce statewide school aid by an additional \$412 million. In a proposed budget that grows \$5.9 billion in state operating funds for a grand total of \$233 billion there are a lot of places that could have been cut or not added in the first place. Changing the foundation aid formula and promoting a statewide bus electrification mandate with an unrealistic timeline - at the same time - is yet another poor policy decision out of Albany that will have negative impacts on our schools and their fiscal stability.

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“There’s nothing magical about this New York State school bus mandate! Even Ms. Frizzle herself would agree that this burdensome mandate takes chances, makes mistakes, and gets

messy. Like Ms. Frizzle, the current deadline for the electrification of all school buses by 2035 is simply unrealistic. The timeline is too short and does not account for the logistical and financial challenges that school districts, bus companies, and power companies will face in implementing this plan. The rushed approach to this plan does not take into account the infrastructure needed to support a full transition to electric buses and fails to adequately address the potential safety concerns that come with electric buses. Each district has unique challenges and priorities, and a fast-paced one-size-fits-all approach is not practical or fair. I am committed to supporting our schools and taking action in Albany with my colleagues in the Senate and the Assembly, but that is not where this fight ends. Residents can take action too. I encourage all New Yorkers to sign the petition on my website (rhoads.nysenate.gov) to 'Pump the Brakes' on the current school bus electrification mandate. We need a more measured, thoughtful, and common-sense approach that takes into account the practical, financial, and safety concerns," said Senator Steve Rhoads (SD 5).

“Rushing the rollout of electric buses in New York State without thoroughly considering the safety of our children, the potential impact to infrastructure, and our local economy is a gamble we cannot afford, especially as many school districts face potential looming cuts in foundation aid. While it’s imperative to recognize the importance of promoting environmental initiatives, we must ensure that the transition is done responsibly and within a realistic time frame that prioritizes the safety and financial well-being of our students and communities,” said Senator Patricia Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick (SD 9).

“Long Island taxpayers are once again being forced to pick up the tab for Albany’s never ending virtue signaling. While cutting \$75 million from Long Island schools, they expect our schools and taxpayers to spend hundreds of millions to purchase thousands of electric buses which our grid can’t handle and which are simply unreliable in cold weather. It’s high time they followed the facts and the science, fix what they’ve broken and leave us alone,” said Senator Jack Martins (SD 7).

“School board members are going to be making decisions about academic programs over batteries - that's what this is going to come down to. This is the granddaddy of unfunded mandates that I have seen in my 20 plus years being in school board service and working with public education. Not only do we have to pump the brakes, we have to stop it entirely. Schools are going to be paying for this before the first electric buses are on the road because if you are in negotiations with the transportation provider for a contract right now you're going to be paying those escalated costs today for the promise of higher expenses tomorrow. We are urging our State lawmakers to delay the deadlines that are currently mandated for zero emission buses. The infrastructure is not in place to meet these deadlines and will only be yet another underfunded mandate placed on local taxpayers,” **said Bob Vecchio (Executive Director of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association).**

“Imposing new green technology, especially on vehicles that will carry young children, is a dangerous gamble when fire safety technology, fire safety codes, and firefighting tactics are still trying to catch up and handle the challenges of the emerging technologies of electric vehicles, energy storage systems and lithium ion batteries. A pause to permit these important safety codes and procedures catch up would be exercising sound judgement,” **said Michael Uttaro (Chief Fire Marshall of Nassau County).**

“It is a job of the Nassau County Fire Service Academy to create training solutions to the problems that are met by the 71 volunteer fire departments here in Nassau County. Over the past two years, we have taken steps to develop awareness programs to assist the fire service in how to safely handle some of the problems that we are faced with in the field with lithium ion emergencies. This initiative will create an impact, not only on the 71 volunteer fire departments, but the fire service Academy as well. Demands for training are constantly increasing. This will just add to the burden of the fire service be it volunteer or career,” **said Paul Wilders (Chief Instructor of the Nassau County Fire Service Academy).**

“Our goal is to provide safe, reliable, and affordable transportation to students and there are challenges in all three of these areas that need more time to get resolved than the current timeline allows,” **said Tim Flood (Executive Vice President at The Trans Group, LLC).**

“The recent mandate from radical Albany politicians requiring all school bus fleets to be zero-emissions by 2035 is rushed, highly impractical, and prioritizes political ideology over the well-being and safety of our children and school districts. Not only do we lack the necessary infrastructure, such as charging stations, to support a fully zero-emissions fleet, but this mandate, if unchanged, will inevitably lead to financial struggles for school districts due to the exorbitant costs associated with the switch. While the goal of a cleaner environment is admirable, there are more sensible and sustainable ways to achieve it that will not jeopardize our educational system and put our children at risk,” **said Assemblyman Dave McDonough (AD 14).**

“This unfunded mandate on the school districts will financially burden tax payers in not only the cost of the school buses but also the infrastructure needed to accommodate these electric busses,” **said Assemblyman John Mikulin (AD 17).**

“The wheels on the bus will NOT go round and round. There isn’t enough power or funds to make this ecologically unfriendly mandate happen,” **said Assemblyman Ari Brown (AD 20).**

“The Mandate that all school bus fleets must be zero-emissions by July 1, 2035 is an unrealistic requirement that is yet again another example where Albany democrats put political ideology before the best interest and possibly the safety of our kids and our school districts. In addition to not having the necessary infrastructure required to accommodate a zero-emissions school bus fleet such as charging stations, this mandate, if unchanged, will simply bankrupt school districts due to the astronomical costs associated with switching over to a zero emission fleet. The cost is not just limited to the buses themselves which is

estimated at \$1.8 billion dollars a year but the ancillary costs of more bus drivers (\$40 million dollars a year) and infrastructure investments (\$3.4 billion). Everyone wants a cleaner environment but there are smarter ways of achieving that goal that will not financially destroy our educational system and put our kids at risk,” **said Assemblyman Brian Curran (AD 21).**

To view the video from the press conference, use the link below:

<https://www.facebook.com/SenatorSteveRhoads/videos/1315775965776691>