

New York Association for Pupil Transportation

Testimony

Joint Legislative Hearing on Education
2024-25 Executive Budget

Our Priorities

Safely Transporting 2.3+ Million School Children
Addressing the School Bus Driver Shortage
Managing Skyrocketing School Transportation Costs

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On behalf of the members of the New York Association for Pupil Transportation, thank you for allowing us to present our recommendations and testimony in response to the 2024-25 Executive Budget proposal. We appreciate the legislature's continued commitment to our school districts and their respective school transportation operations.

As a professional organization dedicated to safely transporting approximately 2.3 million children riding approximately 50,000 school buses to and from school each school day in New York State, we are committed to providing the safest and most efficient school transportation services possible while managing the costs of those services on behalf of local taxpayers to the best of our abilities.

With respect to Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal we offer the following comments.

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE

We are disappointed that the Executive Budget did not provide for the extension of the state retire earnings cap waiver for school district employees due to expire in June of 2024. We respectfully ask the Legislature to help us to address the severe labor shortages experienced by school transportation providers by renewing the earnings cap waiver for state retirees. Historically, retirees from all the state retiree categories have been a source of labor that the school bus industry depended upon to fill driver seats. The bus driver shortage problem needs immediate relief, and the state retiree waiver is an effective tool which has proven to help the industry recruit and retain school bus drivers during this period of unprecedented labor shortage..

The retiree earnings cap waiver approved last year through June of 2024 helps school districts fill school bus driver seats and we ask the state legislature to include the extension of the retiree waiver for at least one more year and consider extending the sunset to 2029.. The school bus driver shortage is the number one problem school transporters face and it needs immediate attention.

NYSED DRIVER TRAINING FUND

NYAPT supports the \$400,000 in continued funding for the State Education Department's school bus driver safety training program. This training fund is used to provide the mandated annual safety training for school bus drivers, monitors and attendants and is the driving force behind our states' enviable school bus safety record. We urge the Legislature's continued support of this funding.

ZERO EMISSIONS SCHOOL BUS

NYAPT, which represents the largest land-based mass transportation system in the state, continues to oppose the all-electric school bus mandate, but fully supports the intent to transform our state's near-zero emissions school bus fleet into a zero emissions fleet.

Current which requires all school buses sold after 2027 to be zero-emission and requires school districts to fully convert to all zero emission buses by 2035, is an ambitious, but unrealistic goal. We cannot support the mandate due to the fact that all-electric school bus technology currently is not a proven technology in the school bus market. Significant problems such as lack of electric infrastructure at our schools and across the state, unproven battery life and reliability, energy efficient interior cabin heaters in colder climates, concerns about battery fires and overall dependability have yet to be fully resolved. Unlike other industries such as trucking, the school bus industry cannot safely operate in the face of these significant unknowns given we transport our states' school children.

Further, we have estimated that it will cost the state and local property taxpayers more than \$15 billion to convert the state's school bus fleet to all electric zero emission buses, and it will result in a permanent annual increase after implementation of more than \$1.35 billion. This estimate does not factor in unknowns such as infrastructure costs, training costs, land acquisition costs or additional vehicle costs to supplement electric bus fleets that do not meet the mileage demands of upstate school bus routes.

Our state is truly diverse geographically and we must understand the limitations of all-electric school buses before we choose a one-size-fits-all approach. Unfortunately, a significant portion of this increased cost will fall on local taxpayers. We are concerned that due to these increased costs, bus replacement will not be supported by local voters and school transportation options will be significantly curtailed.

Current supply chain problems also continue to impact the transition of the fleet. New York's school transportation market is small compared to total vehicles on the road in our state – we are just seven tenths of one percent of all the vehicles at approximately 50,000 school buses. That being said, it is still a complex market, and one that relies on not just the

big Type-C buses, but also small Type-A school buses, which have different economic factors influencing their manufacturing process. Typically, these buses are built on Ford or Chevy chassis and so their availability to the school bus market is very much tied to global pressures. It is safe to say that the big buses will be more readily available, but in places like New York City and Long Island where small school buses are heavily used, we will have significant problems implementing such a policy. Type A buses are not available in the quantities required to meet the mandate. It will take time for this market to develop to provide the quantities of buses required especially given that Ford and Chevy have begun to pull back on their commitment to electric vehicles globally as the demand for EVs has declined

We are disappointed that more attention was not given to the electric bus transition in the Executive Budget given the enormity of the initiative. We recommend the following to the State Legislature for consideration in state budget deliberations to assure a successful transition to zero emission school buses in our State:

- NYAPT continues to call for full state funded pilot projects be supported in place of a statewide mandate as a path to begin the process of transitioning to a zero-emission statewide fleet allowing those school districts that wish to evaluate all-electric buses the financial ability to do so.
- We recommend NYSERDA be tasked with closely monitoring these pilot projects that will provide the industry and other stakeholders with cost and operational data to determine the viability of transitioning to all-electric school buses across the state.
- NYAPT recommends the state provide state transportation aid to school districts for infrastructure engineering transition studies that are required at all school districts.
- NYAPT recommends additional funding be allocated to the State Education Department to hire staff to speed up facility infrastructure reviews and permitting.
- NYAPT recommends the newly passed law which prohibitively mandates a 12-year payback for state transportation aid payments to school districts on leases and purchases of electric buses be re-evaluated and aligned with the useful life of a school bus, which is approximately seven to eight years
- NYAPT recommends state funding be appropriated and guidance be developed on next steps for school districts in the event of a failed local school bus proposition.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations regarding the FY 2024-25 Executive Budget proposal. We are available to discuss these recommendations further should you need additional insight or information.

NYAPT genuinely appreciates legislature's continued support of New York's school transportation system.

Respectfully submitted,



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