



NYAPT

NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

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Our future is riding with us!

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION IN RELATION TO THE 2017-2018 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL

Honorable Members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways & Means Committees:

The New York Association for Pupil Transportation is a professional membership association dedicated to the safe and efficient transportation of our State's students to and from school each day. Our members include the supervisors and managers, technicians, dispatchers, safety trainers, and school bus drivers and attendants who ensure that safety through their diligent and dedicated efforts.

New York State has one of the best safety records in the nation and that achievement is due in large part to the consistent efforts and excellence of those professionals. NYAPT, and our educational partner, the Cyr Foundation, contribute to the success of those individuals through our professional development, technical assistance and advocacy efforts. We are proud of the safety record of the school bus community in New York and encourage you to learn more about what we do and to go out and visit your local school transportation facility. We know you will be amazed and proud as well!

Our association has several specific requests for your consideration in this budget process for the 2017-2018 state fiscal year and those are as follows:

- ❖ Continue to Provide Sufficient Funding for School Transportation
- ❖ Provide Funding in Support of Transportation Services for Universal Pre-Kindergarten Students
- ❖ Allow Expenditures for School Bus Monitors to Be Eligible for Transportation Aid Reimbursement
- ❖ Increase Funding for the School Bus Driver Training Program to a Level of \$500,000 for and Target Increase to Necessary Training
- ❖ Provide Funding for School Transportation Security Measures

❖ Continue to Provide Sufficient Funding for School Transportation

We are pleased that the Executive Budget Proposal includes full funding for school transportation expense reimbursement for expenses incurred in the previous school year. It is vital to school bus safety that the state continue its investment in school bus operations and safety.

NYAPT urges that the Legislature to adopt a budget that reflects this support for school transportation.

❖ Provide Funding in Support of Transportation Services for Universal Pre-Kindergarten Students

NYAPT recommends and strongly urges the inclusion of funds in the State budget to support the delivery of transportation services for students enrolled in Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs. Transportation for Pre-K students is an integral part of the Pre-K experience and provides access to the program for the children involved. Nonetheless, several years ago, the State enacted a law (Chapter 241 of the Laws of 2012) that 'allows' school districts to provide "Pre-K" transportation, but places the burden for paying for that transportation entirely on the school districts. This needs to be corrected.

Numerous studies and reports have documented the essential nature of yellow bus transportation to ensure access to and the safety of the students participating in such programs. Indeed, in some districts, the lack of transportation has presented barriers to launching or expanding Pre-K programs. To wit, we note the strong statement made by the Center for Children's Initiatives in its 2013 study:

The lack of funding for transportation has substantially hampered enrollment in pre-K programs, particularly in the rural parts of the state, and/or imposed substantial additional costs on local school districts. Children in districts with fewer local resources available to support the cost of transportation, or those with parents or guardians who are unable to transport them, will be less likely to attend pre-K programs. Therefore, consistent with the premise that pre-K programs should receive a cost-based allocation correlated Securing the Future of New York's Children | November 2014 13 with the per-pupil funding provided for K-12 students, formula-based aids for transportation, building aid, textbooks and computers, and other needs should also be extended to cover pre-K students as an integral part of the revised stateaid system beginning in 2016-17 (Year 3).

(Center for Children's Initiatives, 2013 Report: Securing the Future of New York's Children)

While we do not seek a mandate for districts to provide such transportation, we believe it is essential to the future growth and success of the State's Pre-Kindergarten program that transportation be promoted and that funding be provided in support of that transportation.

Additionally, the new federal ESSA contained amendments to the McKinney-Vento Act (homeless student education) which requires school districts to ensure the continuity of education for Pre-K students who are homeless and displaced. Among the services that must be provided are transportation services for these students even if the school district does not otherwise provide transportation for Pre-K program enrollees. This new mandate calls for closer state attention to the transportation element of the Pre-K enterprise and to the need to ensure that districts are reimbursed or supported in incurring those costs.

In addition to funding considerations, we would recommend that the State engage in a thorough discussion about issues related to safely and efficiently transporting children to the Pre-K programs. It is important that guidelines be formulated to ensure the safety of these younger students and to ensure the capacity of our school districts and transportation providers to transport them safely and within budget realities. These include issues and topics such as the need for attendants, parent engagement, special equipment, seat belts, driver training and others. In the words of the Center for Children's Initiatives:

To implement truly universal pre-K, New York must expand its system of pupil transportation to include three and four year old children comparable to that provided to K-12 students. Busses and other vehicles must meet the current federal safety standards for three and four year olds. This will require

amendments to the education law to establish appropriate rules, standards, and specifications, as well as funding to ensure appropriate number of monitors, safety seats, and other child restraints.

(Center for Children's Initiatives, 2013 Report: Securing the Future of New York's Children)

In addition, NYAPT has adopted a policy paper on this subject taken from a school transportation perspective. We would be happy to discuss it with members of the Legislature and the legislative staff.

❖ ***Allow Expenditures for School Bus Monitors to Be Eligible for Transportation Aid Reimbursement***

NYAPT strongly urges that the State allow Transportation Aid reimbursement for costs related to employing School Bus Monitors (aides, matrons) on school buses. Currently, only the costs for those individuals employed as 'attendants' on school buses to assist and support the transportation of students with disabilities (whose needs are defined in the student's IEP) are eligible for Transportation Aid reimbursement. Except in very specific circumstances, costs for non-IEP-related monitors and aides are NOT eligible for reimbursement.

The need has increased in reference to managing student behaviors and bullying on school buses. School bus drivers are forced to deal with unruly students engaged in bullying and other forms of bad behavior and the additional staffing is often necessary for overall student safety.

Moreover, as the State begins to advance early childhood education and expand Pre-Kindergarten programs, especially for early intervention and 3-year-old Pre-K, there will be an increased need for an additional adult aboard our school buses to assist those students.

And lastly, as we will note below, there have been numerous instances of non-student riders boarding the school bus and creating trouble or carrying out acts of violence against students and bus drivers. The lack of a second adult on the school bus puts the bus driver in a particularly vulnerable position and perhaps the second adult would serve as a deterrent to such actions by adults and other students alike.

It is time to include monitors in the Transportation Aid eligibility category as well.

❖ ***Increase Funding for the School Bus Driver Training Program to a Level of \$500,000 for and Target Increase to Necessary Training***

NYAPT has since 1997 advocated for the appropriation of funds in the Education Department budget in support of the Comprehensive School Bus Driver Training program. This fund has been sustained at a level of \$400,000 over these past 17 years. We are recommending an increase of \$100,000 to that training fund which would represent the ***first and only*** increase since its inception in 1997. After 17 years with no change, this would increase the State's investment from 17.3 cents to 21.7 cents per student rider. Or in terms of another measure, it would increase our investment in school bus drivers from \$8.00 to \$10.00 per-school-bus-driver per year. We think our students and our drivers need to know we are willing to invest in their safety through this program.

We also believe it is important that the Education Department take specific steps to advance and expand upon sound training programs through those funds. Accordingly, we would recommend to the

Legislature and to the Education Department that such additional funds focus on the following training needs areas:

- 1) training related to safely transporting students enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten programs
- 2) training related to bullying prevention and response, consistent with Dignity Act requirements and best practices
- 3) training for drivers in security measures that will help them to protect the integrity of their bus, their riders and themselves in violent incidents, and
- 4) training related to special education classifications enumerated in the federal IDEA, as required under "PJ's Law"

We cannot ask our 50,000 school bus drivers and thousands of bus monitors to carry out their safety-sensitive responsibilities without ensuring that they have access to timely and useful training in key areas such as those outlined above. This is a smart and necessary investment of public funds in the dedicated men and women in whom we entrust our children every single morning and afternoon.

❖ *Provide Funding for School Transportation Security Measures*

NYAPT urges the State to appropriate a reasonable level of funding in the State budget to ensure the security of school buses and transportation facilities in our schools. Such funding would provide incentives for school districts and school bus operators to invest in perimeter fencing, security lighting, motion sensors, and security/surveillance camera systems to enhance security for their school bus fleets and infrastructure. This could be accomplished by a dedicated appropriation or by allowing such costs to be reimbursable through the Transportation Aid process.

We have a rolling fleet of over 50,000 school buses in New York State – the largest such fleet in the nation – valued at over \$5 Billion. We estimate that some 40% of those valuable and safety-sensitive vehicles are parked each night in open lots where they are not only susceptible to vandalism and terroristic acts but they are actually a bright yellow invitation for wrong-doing.

Recent violations of the integrity of the school bus (e.g., damage to tires, theft of batteries and copper wiring, assaults on bus drivers and children, destruction of bus seats) raise concerns about security of our school buses and facilities, as well as the potential for similar acts of violence or vandalism against those vehicles and individuals. In an era when such random acts of terror or domestic violence in our communities and in our schools is increasingly commonplace, it is only reasonable that we invest in the security of our school bus fleet to help ensure the safety of our students and our drivers.

Several examples we would share with you include:

1. In January 2016, two students vandalized 43 buses in the Somers school district including slashing tires, shattering windows and discharging fire extinguishers. The incident resulted in the school district having to close for one day while the equipment was being repaired.
2. In May 2016, a teen set fire to a school bus at a Yeshiva in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and was charged with a hate crime by the NY City Police Department. The teens tossed flaming sheets of cardboard onto the school bus was completely burned curbside.

3. In May 2016, Whitney Point school district was forced to close school for a day as a result of vandalism that damaged some 19 school buses. The vandals broke bus windows and slashed tires as well as damaging the bus garage and breaking its windows.

This is a very real problem and presents a risk to our schools and our students. We urge you to work with us to identify appropriate ways to invest in the security of our children's school buses.

SUMMARY

The members of the New York Association for Pupil Transportation are dedicated to the safe and efficient transportation of our school children. Over the years, we have come before you for various needs for school transportation including legislation seeking Stop Arm Cameras on school buses, safety equipment, training for school bus drivers for students with special needs, and more. We are appreciative of those efforts you have made to support safe and efficient school transportation.

At this time, we are asking for several important funding considerations. We believe we have stated our case and the need clearly but are available to provide additional information and support that you might require to advance these recommendations further.

Thank you for all you do for the safety of our school children. Everything we do each and every day, we do "For the Children."

Respectfully submitted on behalf of our Members,

Peter F. Mannella
Executive Director
February 14, 2017