

# New York Association for Pupil Transportation

## Testimony

Joint Legislative Hearing on Education  
2021-22 Executive Budget

## Our Priorities

Safely Transportation School Children  
Protecting School Transportation Workers  
Managing School Transportation Costs

## David Christopher

Executive Director  
New York Association for Pupil Transportation (NYAPT)

NYAPT.ORG

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF NYAPT's EXECUTIVE BUDGET POSITIONS**

- NYAPT opposes the capping and consolidation of the eleven expense-based aid categories, including school transportation, into one Services Aid block grant.
- NYAPT opposes any reduction in school transportation aid given that parents and caregivers across the state rely on school buses to safely transport their loved ones to and from school each day.
- NYAPT supports reimbursing school districts for transportation costs associated with delivering meals, instructional materials, and internet service during the period in which schools were closed because of the pandemic; however, we feel the state should also reimburse school districts for costs associated with maintaining their transportation operations and contracts with private school bus contractors during the emergency shutdown caused by COVID-19.
- NYAPT supports the \$400,000 in continued funding for the State Education Department's school bus driver safety training program.
- NYAPT would like to point out that the budget increases funding for universal pre-k but fails to provide any funding to transport these children; therefore, NYAPT supports an increase in school transportation aid above and beyond the FY 2021-22 Executive Budget proposal to address this deficiency.

### **REMARKS**

On behalf of the more than 600 school district members of the New York Association for Pupil Transportation, thank you for allowing us to present our recommendations and testimony in response to the 2021-22 Executive Budget proposal. We appreciate the legislature's continued commitment to our school districts and their school transportation operations.

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

Unfortunately, the FY 2021-2022 Executive Budget proposal does not recognize or honor this commitment. Instead, the budget seeks to eliminate the expense-based aid formula for school transportation and replace it with a Services Aid block grant, cuts future funding to expense-based aid categories by 10.54%, and fails to provide adequate assurances that school districts will be able to meet their legal requirements to provide school transportation services without the burden shifting to local property taxpayers.

**NYAPT would like to respectfully express our unequivocal opposition to the elimination of the expense-based aid category for school transportation and the establishment of a new Services Aid block grant that would cap funding for school transportation.**

NYAPT also opposes the \$393 million reduction to the eleven expense-based aid categories, which includes school transportation. While we appreciate the proposed reduction in the new Services Aid category is fully offset by federal CRRSA funding, we do not support the reductions in school transportation aid in the out years as proposed by this budget.

While some say the block grant approach will simplify the funding process and provide school districts great flexibility, not one school district is actually calling for these changes...and that is because the current expense-based aid formula has proven to be a very effective way for school districts to manage their school transportation costs.

Furthermore, the expense-based aid formula allows school districts to address the unpredictable nature of school transportation funding caused by very important, but cost-fluctuating services, such as transportation to non-public and charter schools, transportation services for students with special needs, and transportation for students who are homeless or in foster care.

In addition, there are state and federal mandates that govern equipment safety parameters and bus driver qualifications that also drive costs. For instance, there is a new requirement by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration scheduled to take effect in February of 2022 that will require additional training mandates on the school transportation industry.

**While NYAPT appreciates that the Executive Budget proposal allows state aid reimbursement for expenditures incurred for the delivery of food, instructional supplies and WIFI during the Executive ordered pause in the Spring of 2020, we are concerned that this proposal does not go far enough.**

Many school districts maintained their bus fleets, retained personnel, and honored contracts with their private school bus contractors in the Spring of 2020 anticipating that state transportation aid would be paid on those expenses -- it was a shock to learn otherwise.

School transportation departments have many operational and financial responsibilities that must continue during shutdowns, even when students are not transported, in order to maintain continuity of service when schools reopen. Those responsibilities include maintenance of school buses, insurance costs, facility expenses, driver recruitment and training, and maintaining state and federal mandated bus driver qualifications. In addition, during the Spring of 2020 school districts kept staff on "stand by" as suggested by the CARES act so as not to further exacerbate the bus driver shortage problem that the industry has been coping with for years. We believe that the lack of state support in this regard has been detrimental to the industry and will cause future damage should future school shutdowns occur.

The lack of reimbursement for these expenses now and into the future will cause delays in school districts reopening, cause private school transportation companies to go out of business, and exacerbate the problem of school bus driver shortages in the industry as many will find employment elsewhere during school district shutdowns. **We ask for your support in providing school transportation aid for these mission-critical expenses incurred during any past, current, and future emergency shutdowns of our schools.**

**Lastly, we appreciate that the Executive Budget proposal includes \$400,000 for the continued funding of the State Education Department's school bus driver safety training program.** This program has been in existence for decades and provides valuable safety training for school bus drivers, attendants and monitors across the state and plays a vital role in keeping our students safe in and around the school bus.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations regarding the FY 2021-22 Executive Budget proposal. We are available to discuss these recommendations with you further should you need additional insight or information.

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

Thank you.