

New York Association for Pupil Transportation

Testimony

Joint Legislative Hearing on Education
2022-23 Executive Budget

Our Priorities

Safely Transporting School Children
Addressing the School Bus Driver Shortage
Managing School Transportation Costs

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On behalf of the more than six hundred members of the New York Association for Pupil Transportation, thank you for allowing us to present our recommendations and testimony in response to the 2022-23 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 approximately 50,000 school buses to and from school each school day in New York State, we are committed to managing the costs of school transportation while providing the safest and most efficient school transportation services possible for local taxpayers.

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

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE

NYAPT supports the Governor's proposal to address the school bus driver shortage by temporarily removing the earnings cap for state retirees. We urge the legislature to include police and fire retirees in this legislation as well. 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 this will be an effective option to retain drivers who are currently working as school bus drivers and to attract new state retirees to work as a school bus drivers.

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 annually train our

states' school bus drivers, monitors and attendants and is the driving force behind our states' enviable school bus safety record.

ZERO EMISSIONS SCHOOL BUS

NYAPT opposes the all-electric school bus mandate, contained in the Governor's executive budget, but fully supports the Governor's intent to transform our state's near-zero emissions school bus fleet into a zero emissions fleet.

The Governor's proposal, which requires all school buses sold after 2027 be all-electric zero-emission school buses powered by battery or hydrogen and requires school districts to fully convert to all-electric buses by 2035, is an ambitious, but unreachable goal due to the fact that all-electric and hydrogen school bus technology is not a proven technology in the school bus market. Issues such as infrastructure, battery life, interior cabin heat in colder climates and dependability have yet to be resolved.

NYAPT supports full funding of electric school bus pilot projects as a path to begin the process of transitioning to a zero-emission school bus fleet allowing those school districts that wish to evaluate all-electric buses the ability to do so. Pilot projects will allow the school districts and the state to determine the viability of all-electric school buses and allow the industry to safely and reliably deploy electric school buses without interrupting the operations of the largest land-based transportation system in the state.

The pilot programs should fully fund the costs of the school buses and the infrastructure required to fuel, service and support the vehicles. School districts should also be provided funding to collect and report the data to the state of New York.

With very few all-electric school buses on the road today, the data just doesn't support making such a drastic shift away from today's near zero emission school buses.

Furthermore, in placing all our emphasis on electric, we discourage other greener technologies from entering the marketplace. *An open market that allows the manufacturers, school districts, school bus distributors and all the stakeholders to work together to reach a zero emissions goal is a more effective strategy than mandating that school districts can only purchase electric school buses.* We must maintain flexibility in the marketplace or risk being dependent on a technology that may not meet our needs in the future.

Further, we have estimated that converting to all-electric will be expensive and could **cost an additional \$15 billion to convert the fleet**. This number does not factor in infrastructure costs, training costs, alternative vehicles costs for buses that can't meet the mileage demands of upstate school bus routes, and many more unforeseen cost considerations. 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.

Without getting deep into the supply chain problems plaguing the globe, the state must understand that New York's school transportation market is small compared to the total vehicles on the road in our state – we are just .7% of all the vehicles on the road today or

around 50,000 school buses. That being said, it's 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 supply 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.

As stated earlier, NYAPT believes a robust statewide all-electric school bus pilot program fully funded by the State of New York is the smarter approach to get us to the goal of a zero-emissions school bus fleet.

LEASE LAW

NYAPT supports the expansion of the school bus lease law to 10-years *but not to the detriment of our public-private partnership with the state's school bus distributors (dealers).*

NYAPT encourages the state to enforce the state's dealer franchise law to protect the public-private partnership that school districts and school bus distributors have forged over the last sixty or so years. This public-private partnership saves the state hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

School bus distributors provide school district transportation departments vital education and training regarding new school bus safety and environmental technologies. They provide service, parts and body repair in support of school districts. They provide technicians when school districts need them and loaner school buses when buses breakdown or are being serviced. All this to help school districts meet stringent New York Department of Transportation and federal school bus safety regulation.

We ask that the state budget include language that reinforces the requirements that companies that sell or lease a school bus in New York State have a certified, legal and viable school bus dealership located in the state of New York.

PRE-K

NYAPT would like to point out that the budget includes funding for universal pre-k but fails to provide any funding to transport pre-k children; therefore, NYAPT supports an increase in school transportation aid beyond the FY 2022-23 Executive Budget proposal to address this deficiency.

TRANSPORTATION AID

NYAPT historically has opposed 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. Given that the Governor has requested historic funding for schools to include an increase in expense base aid as well, we thank Governor

Hochul for her commitment to school transportation services and ask for legislative support as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations regarding the FY 2022-23 Executive Budget proposal. We are available to discuss these recommendations with you further should you need additional insight or information.

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

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Christopher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Christopher
Executive Director
NYAPT