



NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

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NYAPT

Our future is riding with us!

New York Association for Pupil Transportation Testimony

Joint Legislative Hearing on Education
2023-24 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 seven 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 2023-24 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 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 2023 Executive Budget proposal we offer the following comments.

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE

NYAPT strongly supports the Governor's proposal to temporarily remove the earnings cap 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 helps to retain drivers who currently work as school bus drivers and to attract new drivers to the workforce. The retiree waiver proposed for extension through June of 2024 is a positive step to address workforce shortages and we ask the state legislature to support extension of the retiree waiver for another year.

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.

ZERO EMISSIONS SCHOOL BUS

NYAPT continues to oppose the zero emissions 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 legislation that requires all school buses sold after 2027 be zero-emission and requires school districts to fully convert to all zero emission buses by 2035, is an ambitious, but unrealistic goal due to the fact that all-electric school bus technology is not a proven technology in the school bus market. Issues such as insufficient electric infrastructure, battery life, interior cabin heat in cold climates and dependability have yet to be fully resolved.

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 billion. This estimate does not factor in unknowns such as infrastructure costs, training costs, land acquisition costs or additional vehicle costs for electric buses 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.

Current supply chain problems also 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, Type-A buses are built on Ford or Chevy chassis and 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.

We support the Governor's proposal for **zero emissions progress reporting** by school districts in order to track progress made on this transition. Using this data, the legislature can make an informed decision on the future viability of the school bus transition to zero emissions and reevaluate the mandated deadline dates, as necessary.

NYAPT continues to recommend full state funded pilot projects be supported 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 ability to do so. Pilot projects will provide cost and operational data to determine the viability of transitioning to all-electric school buses and allow the industry to safety and

reliably deploy electric school buses without disrupting the operations of the largest land-based transportation system in the state.

PRE-K

NYAPT would like to point out that the Executive Budget proposal includes increased funding for universal pre-k but fails to provide funding to transport pre-k children. **NYAPT recommends an increase in school transportation aid to provide transportation aid for the transport of pre-k age students.** Participation in pre-k programs is contingent on transportation to school and transportation aid should be available to support the transport of pre-k students under the same mileage criteria as K-12 grade students.

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. This year, the Governor has requested historic funding for schools to include an increase in expense-based aid and **we thank Governor Hochul for her commitment to school transportation services and ask for legislative support as well.**

We are however extremely concerned that the state amended the **amortization schedule for electric school bus purchases** from 5-years to 12-years in last year's state budget and has not addressed this in this year's proposed executive budget. We cannot stress enough the importance, and necessity, of switching this back to 5-years. The life expectancy of an electric bus is no longer than a diesel/gas bus. In many areas of the state, school buses are retired well before 12 years to avoid costly repairs and to meet stringent NYSDOT inspection standards. Upstate school buses last about 7-8 years, while buses on Long Island are closer to 10-years. Retaining buses for 12 years as a state standard will increase repair costs and reduce reliability. Most importantly, a 12-year state aid reimbursement term for the purchase of electric buses does not incentivize school districts to transition bus fleets to zero emissions.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations regarding the FY 2023-24 Executive Budget proposal. We are available to discuss these recommendations further should you need additional insight or information.

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

Respectfully submitted,



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