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BILL: House Bill 259
TITLE: Maryland Transportation Authority - Public School Buses -
Exemption from Tolls
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 16, 2017
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 259, which would exempt school system owned school buses from tolls or fees charged for using Maryland Transportation Authority facilities.

MABE appreciates the General Assembly's attention to and efforts to relieve costs incurred by local school systems, including tolls collected for the transport of students in school vehicles. Local boards are continuously engaged in the pursuit of cost savings and efficiencies in operations; and House Bill 259 is certainly consistent with these objectives.

The safe transportation of students to and from school is an especially high priority for all school systems. Similarly, the cost efficiency of student transportation is also a high priority. Costs can increase rapidly in response to increased fuel prices, and new legislative mandates can impose new obligations to provide services. For example, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires that homeless students must be provided with transportation to and from their school of origin, and transportation services may include crossing district boundaries or providing special education busing. MABE appreciates the General Assembly's passage of legislation in 2016 to exempt from the motor fuel tax, motor fuel that is purchased for use in a school bus.

Local boards recognize that transportation services to and from public schools play a critical role in addressing the educational opportunity gap. Therefore, MABE has pledged to cooperate with other interested groups to advocate for adequate public school transportation funding, including transportation funding to support programs outside the regular school day. House Bill 259 would contribute to the bottom line for school systems striving to optimize available student transportation dollars in the best interests of the local school system.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 259.