

BILL: House Bill 1226
TITLE: Vehicle Laws - School Bus Safety - Occupant Capacity
DATE: February 28, 2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's boards of education, opposes House Bill 1226, which would strictly prohibit the number of pupils on a school bus from exceeding the seating capacity of the school bus.

MABE appreciates the intent of this bill to help ensure that bus routes and scheduling provide adequate seating for all students, and that school buses are always operated in the safest manner possible. However, MABE believes that current state regulation provides the appropriate balance of mandating adequate seating and providing at least some flexibility in emergency situations. MABE believes this balance, already contained in the law, is consistent with and already accomplishes the intent of this bill. The current regulation (COMAR 13A.06.07.13) provides that:

“School vehicles shall be routed so that all students are seated and loads do not exceed the manufacturer’s rated capacity. If an emergency situation creates an overload, this condition shall be corrected within a reasonable time.”

Local boards of education place the highest priority on the safety of students during transportation to and from school. Student transportation represents enormous investments at both the state and local levels; investments that pay off every day for hundreds of thousands of Maryland’s students and the dedicated school employees who have worked to make it so.

For these reasons, MABE respectfully requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1226.