

Transportation Funding

(Adopted 1981, 1984, 1987; amended 1990, 1992; readopted 1995, 1997; amended 2000, 2002, 2005; readopted 2008, 2011; amended 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020)

WHEREAS, adequate state funding for public school transportation has been a long-time goal of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE); and

WHEREAS, the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002 increased state funding for student transportation to address chronic underfunding through the 1980s and 1990s; and

WHEREAS, between FY 1981 and 1998 total expenditures for student transportation increased by 180 percent yet, during this same period, state expenditures for student transportation increased by only 35 percent; and

WHEREAS, the percentage of total student transportation costs funded by the state peaked at about 90 percent in 1984 and declined gradually in each subsequent year to a funding level of 36 percent in 1998; and

WHEREAS, for nearly twenty years, state funding for disabled student transportation was limited to \$500 times the number of disabled students requiring special transportation services who were transported by the local board in excess of the number transported during the 1980-1981 school year; and

WHEREAS, the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002 increased the base transportation grant for 15 counties that experienced aggregate enrollment increases between 1980 and 1995, a time when the transportation formula did not include annual adjustments for enrollment increases, and increases by FY 2008 per pupil funding for students receiving special transportation services from \$500 to \$1000; and

WHEREAS, additional requirements for student transportation have been created through mandated programs; and

WHEREAS, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires that homeless students must be provided with transportation to and from their school of origin at parent or guardian request; transportation services may include crossing district boundaries or providing special education busing; and if the student transportation needs cross district boundaries, the two districts must determine how to divide the responsibility and cost; and

WHEREAS, the state mandates that school systems provide targeted prekindergarten for low-income four-year olds and yet prekindergarten students are not included in the per pupil calculation of student transportation funding; and

WHEREAS, rapid increases in gasoline prices can present significant unanticipated expenditures from transportation budgets and potentially reduce available funding for other educational programs and services; and

WHEREAS, in 2016 the General Assembly enacted legislation to exempt from the motor fuel tax, motor fuel that is purchased for use in a school bus owned by a county board of education or used to transport students by a school bus operator under contract with a county board of education; and

WHEREAS, the final Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in the State of Maryland issued in November 2016 recommended using the greater of the prior year's FTE enrollment or the average of the three prior years' FTE enrollment to result in higher enrollments and transportation aid amounts in declining enrollment districts; and

WHEREAS, in 2016 and 2017 legislation was introduced, but not enacted, which would have imposed an unfunded mandate that all school buses be equipped with seatbelts, either as a requirement to retrofit current buses or as a design standard for new buses; and

WHEREAS, federal law requires small school buses, weighing 10,000 pounds or less, to be equipped with seat belts; and in this way, federal requirements regarding seat belts are reasonably related to the size and relative safety of school buses; and

WHEREAS, transportation services to and from public schools play a critical role in addressing the educational opportunity gap; and

WHEREAS, in 2020 legislation was introduced, but not enacted, which would have imposed an unfunded mandate that all school buses be zero-emission vehicles; and

WHEREAS, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting state and local education recovery plans, especially the social distancing standards, presented enormous student transportation funding and policy challenges for local school systems and bus contractors and drivers;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that MABE will cooperate with other interested groups to advocate for adequate public school transportation funding, including transportation funding to support programs outside the regular school day; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will urge the Governor and the Legislature to fully fund the state share of student transportation funding and to pursue transportation funding for prekindergarten students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will urge the Governor and General Assembly to provide state funding to assist local school systems in providing expanded student transportation services necessitated by public health related social distancing restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will oppose new unfunded mandates impacting student transportation, including mandatory seatbelts on school buses, or a reduction of the state share of per pupil student transportation costs.