

Committees: Economic Matters & Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 832 - "Public Utilities—Electric School Bus Pilot Program"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable, with Amendment

Hearing Date: February 18, 2021

Climate Parents of Prince George's supports, with amendment, HB 832, "Electric School Bus Pilot Program"

The need to transition to zero emission school buses is vital for Maryland to meet its obligation to the current generation of young people and to future generations. It is important for the health of the students to switch to clean alternatives given the terrible impacts that diesel exhaust has on lung function, the potential for cancer, and learning ability. We cannot become the zero emission society that we need to by 2045 if our school system continues to rely on dirty 20th century technologies.

This approach of utilizing electric school bus batteries for grid support has the potential for making electric school buses more affordable, while helping to reduce the impact on reliability to the grid as renewables become more common. Pilots of electric school buses with vehicle to grid technology are popping up throughout the country including in California, Michigan, New York, Vermont and most notably Virginia. Maryland too needs to explore and understand vehicle to grid school buses, and this pilot program has the potential to kick start Maryland's electric school bus revolution.

And the need for electric school buses are great. Diesel school buses produce high levels of fine particulate matter exhaust, which when inhaled can lead to premature death, impact learning, and cause cancer. Besides the climate benefits from switching to electric buses, a successful switch to electric buses will be an investment in a generation of healthier, educated students.

Three Requested Amendments:

We are concerned about the process of choosing which school district gets to participate in the pilot. For one, priorities should be given to counties with current air quality problems and historically disadvantaged communities. Secondly, the local school district should have a role in choosing to participate since having a pilot foisted upon a community by the Public Service Commission (PSC) will not lead to buy-in of this innovative and cost-effective approach.

We are also concerned with the lack of specific reporting timelines. The PSC must be required to provide regular updates on progress, successes, and problems. This is crucial so all Maryland school districts can learn from the experience and implement their own programs without having to wait five years for completion of the pilot.

Lastly, we are concerned that the program will not be set up to meet the needs of the schools. There are no limitations in place so that the buses won't be pulled out of use when needed for transportation purposes. For example on a hot June afternoon towards the end of the school year there might be a desire by an utility to use the bus's battery for grid support rather than getting students home.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report, with AMENDMENT, for this important legislation.