

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 901

(Senator Hershey)

Judicial Proceedings

Environmental Matters

Kent County and Queen Anne's County - School Buses - Length of Operation

This bill allows conventional school buses in Kent and Queen Anne's counties to operate for 15 years, subject to specified requirements.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any reduction in the number of school buses the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must approve for use each year will not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: The finances of Kent County Public Schools (KCPS) and Queen Anne's County Public Schools (QACPS) are not substantially affected.

Small Business Effect: School bus contractors serving Kent and Queen Anne's counties will not be substantially affected because KCPS and QACPS do not anticipate substantial changes to its school bus replacement cycle.

Analysis

Current Law: Unless it fails to meet applicable safety standards, a conventional school bus may be operated for up to 12 years, except in Calvert, Caroline, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, where it may be operated for up to 15 years *without* approval of the State Superintendent of Schools, if it meets applicable safety standards and maintenance standards described below.

Conventional school buses may be operated beyond the 12-year limit only if (1) the State Superintendent of Schools grants approval; (2) the bus is maintained under a preventive maintenance plan that is approved by the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) and the Department of State Police and includes a twelfth-year inspection and subsequent semi-annual inspections; (3) any structural repairs to the bus meet or exceed the manufacturer's original manufacturing standards, as certified by an independent expert approved by MVA; and (4) the bus is properly equipped with specified safety features.

Background: Kent County has 32 school buses, all of which are contractor operated. Queen Anne's County has 89 school buses, of which 74 are contractor operated and 15 are owned by the county. In fiscal 2012, Kent County spent \$2.3 million on student transportation, or an estimated \$1,122 per rider, and Queen Anne's County spent \$6.7 million on student transportation, or an estimated \$902 per rider. Statewide, local school systems spent an average of \$773 per rider, or \$349 and \$129 less per rider than in Kent County and Queen Anne's County, respectively. Kent County expended more per rider than any other county; spending per rider for seven counties was above that for Queen Anne's County.

MSDE oversees approval of waivers from the 12-year limitation on the duration of school bus operation. QACPS submitted 14 waiver requests in the current school year and 8 waiver requests in the 2012-2013 school year. QACPS advises that its requests for waivers are typically granted and that presently nine of its buses are over 12 years old. KCPS currently has two buses that are over 12 years old and anticipates that for the next several years an average of three buses per year will exceed the 12-year limit.

Local Fiscal Effect: KCPS and QACPS advise that because waivers are typically granted the bill will not significantly affect the replacement cycle for school buses and therefore will not have a significant impact upon the per vehicle allotments paid to contractors. The bill will remove the administrative tasks involved in seeking waivers and may marginally reduce inspection costs but the fiscal effect is assumed to be minimal for both local school systems.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1034 (Kent and Queen Anne's County Delegations) - Environmental Matters.

Information Source(s): Kent and Queen Anne's counties, Maryland State Department of Education, Department of State Police, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2014
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Analysis by: Scott P. Gates

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510