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2024 Board of
Directors

OPPOSITION: HB1360 - School Bus Transition – Propane-Powered School Buses – Grant Program, Fund, and Purchase

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Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV opposes HB1360 - School Bus Transition – Propane-Powered School Buses – Grant Program, Fund, and Purchase.

In 2019, the General Assembly took an important step by passing HB1255, which established the Zero-Emission Vehicle School Bus Transition Grant program. This program was designed to aid the transition from diesel-fueled school buses to zero-emission electric buses. Its primary goals were to safeguard the health of schoolchildren and communities while also combatting the escalating climate crisis. Any proposed alterations to this program to include propane-powered buses would contradict these goals. Such modifications would perpetuate the exposure of children to harmful contaminants and exacerbate the already critical climate crisis. It is imperative to uphold the original intent of the grant program to effectively address these pressing issues.

Propane, a fossil fuel, emits harmful pollutants that are similar to those produced by diesel combustion, including oxides of nitrogen and organic compounds, which pose significant health risks. The emissions from propane buses are comparable to or even exceed those of current diesel models, contributing to health hazards for children, communities, and the climate. Notably, propane buses release higher levels of carbon monoxide and ozone-causing toxins from their tailpipes, exposing students and drivers to these pollutants. By opting for propane buses, we effectively commit to this technology for at least the next 12 years, subjecting children to these risks throughout their entire school journey.

Analyses conducted with government tools demonstrate that propane buses emit higher levels of carbon emissions per mile than electric buses throughout their entire life cycles, exacerbating the climate crisis and jeopardizing the welfare of future generations¹. The harmful emissions from propane-powered school buses contribute significantly to the disproportionate burden of air pollution endured by communities of color. Studies reveal that a significant majority of residents in areas with the poorest air quality are people of color, facing substantially higher levels of pollution than their white counterparts. Considering that Black and low-income students are

¹ <https://electricschoolbusinitiative.org/evidence-clear-electric-school-buses-are-best-choice-reduce-emissions>

more likely to rely on school buses, reducing tailpipe emissions becomes imperative for advancing equity.

Zero-emission electric school buses are the safest alternative for the health of school children and the climate. In Maryland, approximately one in ten children suffer from asthma, and this rate is higher among minority groups.² Asthma is a leading chronic illness among children in the United States and it's also one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.³ In Maryland, 19.2 percent of parents reported that their child missed 1-2 days of school because of asthma during the past year and 9.7 percent said their child missed over seven days due to asthma.⁴ Children riding in zero-emissions buses experience lower exposure to air pollution, less pulmonary inflammation, more rapid lung growth over time, and reduced absenteeism.⁵

On December 28, 2023, The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) released Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, outlining a comprehensive framework to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 60% by 2031, with a net-zero target by 2045. The plan underscores the urgency of transitioning a significant portion of Maryland's vehicle fleet, including school buses, to zero-emission models. HB1360 runs contrary to this goal.

Every day over 650,000 children in Maryland take one of the approximately 7,200 diesel school buses to school in Maryland. It's imperative to safeguard their health and secure their future by moving away from fossil fuel technologies. Transitioning from diesel to propane, another fossil fuel, fails to address the lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions concern. Instead, it perpetuates reliance on unsustainable practices, harming children and communities and undermining the state's climate goals.

For these reasons, Maryland LCV urges an UNFAVORABLE report on this bill.

² <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/mch/Documents/Asthma%20in%20Maryland%202012.pdf>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/asthma/index.htm>

⁴ <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/mch/Documents/Asthma%20in%20Maryland%202012.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.atsjournals.org/doi/10.1164/rccm.201410-1924OC>