

Sept. 16, 2020
Senate Education Committee
Proponent Testimony/SB350

Good afternoon Chairman Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and Committee Members. My name is Larry Keough. I am an associate director for the Catholic Conference of Ohio and legislative advocate for Catholic Schools.

We appreciate Sen. Brenner sponsoring this legislation. It is an important issue as the school year is underway and many students across the state are not afforded bus transportation, or offered public transit in lieu of a yellow school bus.

Transportation is essential. Resident pupils whose families pay local, state and federal taxes to support the public educational system and meet the requirements in Revised Code 3327.01 should be afforded school-bus transportation in which they arrive and depart from school safely and in a timely manner.

But unfortunately, families are denied this right as resolutions are passed at the local level, declaring bus transportation impractical and offering a modest \$250 payment in lieu of transportation.

Transportation should be the rule and payment in lieu of transportation should be the exception.

A resolution for impracticality can be declared by identifying one or more of the six elements under (A) in RC 3327.02.

Our recommendation is for such a declaration to be supported by data and disclosed to the public when the resolution occurs.

We are pleased the bill provides transportation while prohibiting public transit as an option for students in grades K-8 for the 2020-2021 school year.

For many families, public transit is a non-starter for safety reasons.

Subjecting an elementary-age student on public transit is potentially unsafe and places children at-risk.

There are those who may contend declarations of impracticality and public transit stem from COVID-19. This is understandable.

But well before the pandemic, the sub group on bus transportation within the other chamber's School Funding Work Group discussed rolling back the rights of bus transportation for students who were enrolled in Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools.

The basis for the roll back was Ohio is the only state in the Midwest establishing bus ridership for students enrolled in Catholic, other chartered nonpublic schools and community schools.

The historical context was not mentioned in those discussions. Legislation, entitled the Fair Bus Bill Act, received favorable passage in the mid 1960s and was first applied in the 1966-1967 school year.

After 54 years, bus transportation is a badge of honor for Ohio and its students.

Thank you. At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions.