



Akron Public Schools®

Senate Education Committee Senate Bill 350 Opponent Testimony September 23, 2020

Thank you Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition of S.B. 350 as proposed. My name is William B. Andexler, Transportation Coordinator for Akron Public Schools (APS), the fifth largest urban public school district within the state.

I come before you representing a district that is committed to providing the safest, legal, least restrictive, viable modes of transportation service available within our region. APS supports approximately 21,000 Akron Public students throughout the district's 55 square mile area as well as 2,255 students enrolled in non-public, parochial and charter schools. Akron Public Schools is also required to support transportation services for approximately 1,450 students with required Individual Education Plan (IEP) mandates; 550 students meeting McKinney-Vento Homeless status and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) traveling over a seven county area within Northeast Ohio on a daily basis.

Akron Public Schools wants to acknowledge the testimony provided by Mr. Loren Michael Johnson, Director of Pupil Transportation Services for Cincinnati Public Schools, provided on September 16, 2020 to this committee as being an accurate accounting of the various Ohio Revised Codes mandating pupil transport within the state.

As the district of residence, Akron Public Schools would like the members of this committee to recognize that to meet the needs of all students eligible for transportation services a number of factors are carefully taken into consideration when establishing the availability and viability of transportation options. To assist the forty-two (42) non-public, parochial and charter schools in the Akron area, APS conducts an annual meeting during the current school year to which all schools are requested to send a representative to review the upcoming transportation plans for the next school year, which includes representatives from the Ohio Department of Education's Pupil Transportation Office. During the meeting, school representatives are asked to provide school contact information; school calendars; student rosters and daily time schedules to assist with successful route planning as Request For Transportation (RFT) forms are completed by parents/guardians of students enrolled in their schools.

To meet all transportation needs APS has at its disposal a fleet of 87 yellow regular school buses; 13 orthopedic yellow school buses and the district's annual contracts with the area METRO Regional Transportation Authority; 160 Independent Van Contractor Operators and City Yellow Taxi Services. APS also had through the 2019-2020 school year a qualified vendor to provide supplemental yellow bus service, which provided additional yellow school bus service for thirty-one (31) bus routes servicing 1,400 students districtwide. Unfortunately, APS could not legally secure this additional supplemental service for the 2020-2021 school year which then further reduced the options for transportation services, therefore, these 1,400 students had to be accommodated using other legal transportation methods.

Senate Bill 350 as proposed would remove a legal, viable and safe option to provide K - 8 students with transportation to the school of their choice by using public transportation which in Akron is the METRO Regional Transit Authority. Should this option not be available, APS would be impacted by the following costs:

- Need an additional thirty-one (31) buses to be added to our fleet with a capital expense of approximately \$3,000,000.00.
- Need to interview, hire and train thirty-one (31) additional bus drivers at an approximate cost of \$1,000,000.00 in wages and benefits which is an annual cost. Nationally there is a driver shortage and Akron Public Schools is currently experiencing a driver shortage.
- Need to purchase additional property to park the buses; build additional maintenance facilities including a fuel depot - these capital expenses are unknown.
- Need to add two additional mechanics to its current staff at an annual cost of \$110,000.00 in wages and benefits.
- Need to secure additional property, liability and fleet insurance coverage for all additional assets.
- Need to increase its budget for fuel and maintenance repair cost by approximately \$280,000.00 annually.

Akron Public Schools is directly opposed to the adoption of Senate Bill 350 as it is a singular impractical solution to a very complex issue that occurs statewide. Senate Bill 350, if passed, would circumvent local authority of a Board of Education to make local decisions that will support the equitable determination of the safest, legal, least restrictive, viable modes of services available to eligible students qualified for transportation. Senate Bill 350 will also negate a public school district's ability to apply district general funds that are not supported by Federal or State appropriations to allocate the proper legal mode(s) of transportation at their discretion.

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Akron Public Schools wants to advise the Senate Education Committee the complete ramification of the proposed Senate Bill 350 will have on our current and future operations. APS is willing and able to work with Senator Brenner and the Senate Education Committee on developing a task force of key stakeholders to properly propose improvements to the current legislation to ensure the safe transportation of all our students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Joining me today is Debra Foulk, Executive Director of Business Affairs at Akron Public Schools. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have about our testimony today or any transportation services offered by the Akron Public Schools.

William B. Andexler
Transportation Coordinator
Akron Public Schools