



**Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 350 Testimony
Ohio School Boards Association
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Sept. 23, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Senate Bill (SB) 350. My name Will Schwartz with the Ohio School Boards Association. Joining me today for this testimony and in answering your questions are Kevin Miller with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators and Katie Johnson with the Ohio Association of School Business Officials.

Our organizations represent public school district boards of education, superintendents, treasurers/CFOs, business managers, and other school business officials from around the state. SB 350 would prohibit school districts from providing transit passes in the current school year to students in grades kindergarten through eight who are entitled to transportation services by their resident district. It also would require a deduction of state funds from a district for noncompliance with this provision. On behalf of our members, we oppose SB 350.

School districts in Ohio are required to transport students in grades kindergarten through eight who live more than two miles from their schools and must provide this service to students attending schools operated by the district, chartered nonpublic schools, community schools, and STEM schools. An overwhelming majority of Ohio's districts go beyond this state minimum and provide service to high school students and also service for students who live fewer than two miles from their schools.

There are several methods by which districts provide transportation services to students, like yellow school buses, vans, public transit buses, and taxis. More than 767,000 students were transported on nearly 14,000 yellow school buses in fiscal year (FY) 2020. A closer look at this data indicates that 20 districts provided transit passes to their own students, a total of more than 33,000 students. Meanwhile, seven districts provided transit passes to resident students who attended chartered nonpublic schools, a total of more than 6,000 students. Finally, 10 districts did so for resident students who attended community schools, a total of more than 4,000 students.

The average cost of transporting a student in Ohio in FY20 was \$1,077.09¹. However, the cost of transporting community, nonpublic, or STEM school students is considerably more expensive. That's because ridership by these schools' students is significantly less than that of traditional public school ridership, but the operating, maintenance, and personnel costs remain the same. Additionally, bus route efficiencies are much higher for public students by concentrated building attendance and maximizing trips, whereas bus trips for community, nonpublic, and STEM schools

¹ <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/School-Transportation/School-Transportation-Finance/Payment-in-Lieu-of-2019-2020.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>.

take longer travel times to a larger number of buildings and are often in and out of the district, further diminishing the capacity of the vehicle.

Given these inefficiencies and the limited number of school buses and drivers available, public school administrators often identify other unique ways to maintain transportation service for children and families by utilizing shared services. One of those ways, particularly in larger, urban school districts, is to use metropolitan transit services which have existing infrastructure and workforces in place and can provide service to students who otherwise might be without it.

SB 350's prohibition on utilizing this method of transportation would significantly disrupt longstanding practices and current transportation schedules in the middle of the school year. In cases where districts use school buses for their own high school students, those buses would have to be reassigned to students in lower grades who otherwise may have been provided a transit pass.

Additionally, to comply with SB 350, districts would be forced to incur millions of dollars in purchases of new school buses, each of which costs roughly \$90,000 and takes months to fulfill. They also would be forced to hire hundreds more drivers, which, itself, carries its own challenges as we currently are experiencing a nationwide bus driver shortage, and many drivers are in a high-risk group for COVID-19.

The net effect of SB 350 would result in the unintended loss of service for thousands of school children. Moreover, the bill would impose an enormously unfunded mandate at a time when state funding is at reduced levels, local revenues are declining, and our school-funding system has seen the state's share of pupil transportation reduced from 60% to 25% in just three years.

We are ready to work with bill's sponsor to address concerns about pupil transportation services in Ohio and discuss ways to ensure that state and local governments can work together to provide safe and efficient ways for Ohio's children to get to and from school.

Chair Lehner and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for your time and attention. We would be happy to address your questions.