



Akron Public Schools

Sylvester Small Administration Building

**Written Testimony for the Ohio Senate Education Committee
Regarding HB 96 – Restrictions on Mass Transit for Student Transportation
Submitted by: Debra J. Foulk and William B. Andexler
Date: May 8, 2025**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide important information on House Bill 96 for your review and consideration.

My name is Debra J. Foulk. I am the Executive Director - Business Affairs for Akron Public Schools in Summit County. Included in this correspondence is Mr. William B. Andexler, Transportation Consultant, from Shared Service Alliance.

We appreciate the work of this committee and the General Assembly in supporting Ohio's public schools, and thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding House Bill 96 and its proposed restrictions on the use of mass transit for student transportation. We are writing to express our strong concern about the unintended consequences this legislation will have on thousands of Ohio students and families who currently rely on public transportation as a safe, reliable, and cost-effective way to attend school.

As long serving transportation leaders who work closely with school districts across Ohio, we can attest to the essential role that mass transit plays in providing equitable educational access particularly for high school students in urban districts. This is especially true in Akron and Youngstown, among many others, where mass transit partnerships have been successfully and responsibly used for decades.

In Akron, for example, the Akron Public Schools (APS) system serves a wide geographic area encompassing nearly 60 square miles. The district offers a network of 57 college and career academies and specialty programs across nine high schools covering grades 9-12, including Akron Early College High School, located on the University of Akron campus. These innovative models are dependent on student mobility, made possible through APS's partnership with its area METRO Regional Transit Authority.

Students use METRO services to travel to/from school daily, career internships, part-time jobs, dual-enrollment college courses, and extracurricular enrichment opportunities throughout the district. Each METRO swipe costs APS just \$1, with no cost passed on to families, a crucial factor in supporting compulsory daily attendance and educational continuity. APS staff are present at the METRO's central transit hub during peak hours to

assist and supervise students, adding a layer of safety and support to students and community using the transit system.

Youngstown City Schools also utilize Western Reserve Transit Authority (WRTA) public transportation at no cost to families. This system is indispensable for students who would otherwise lack access to consistent transportation due to funding or logistical constraints.

The proposed changes in HB 96—particularly the requirement that students cannot travel by mass transit using a central mass transit hub in Ohio’s most populous counties—would effectively dismantle existing, functional systems in places like Akron, Cleveland, and Cincinnati. Such restrictions are not only impractical given the structure of existing mass transit networks but would severely limit student access to education, enrichment and wellness opportunities offered by medical support providers in these areas.

Further complicating this issue is the federal regulation under 49 CFR § 605.1, which prohibits mass transit authorities from operating routes exclusively for school transportation without risking the loss of federal funding. In fact, this issue arose in the early 2000s when the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) reviewed METRO's services provided to APS and clarified that mass transit systems must serve the general public and not operate as de facto school bus systems.

Additionally, districts are not required to provide yellow bus service to high school students, and for many urban districts, the cost of expanding or reinstating yellow bus operations is simply not feasible. Replacing existing mass transit use with school buses would impose significant financial strain, requiring additional fleets, staffing, maintenance, routing infrastructure along with increased insurance coverage involving liability and property areas that most districts cannot support under current funding levels.

To illustrate the scope of this issue, over **31,000 students across Ohio** currently use mass transit to access their education. Affected districts include large public systems such as Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Akron, as well as numerous charter and community schools. If HB 96 is enacted with its current language, these students would face immediate and profound barriers to quality educational access.

In summary:

- HB 96 threatens to disrupt successful mass transit partnerships without providing viable alternatives.
- Restrictions on transfer limits and hub use are impractical and incompatible with how urban transit systems operate.
- The financial burden of replacing mass transit with school bus service is unsustainable for districts.

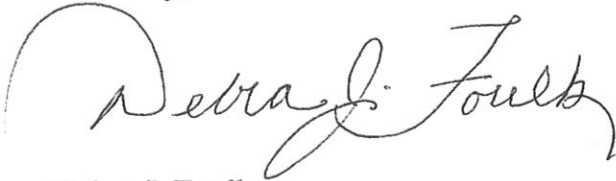
- The legislation would disproportionately impact on economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and those participating in career-tech and college credit programs.
- It may also place mass transit systems at risk of violating federal funding restrictions.

We respectfully urge the Senate to reconsider the mass transit provisions of HB 96 and preserve the ability of school districts to partner with regional transit systems in the best interest of student access, safety, and fiscal responsibility.

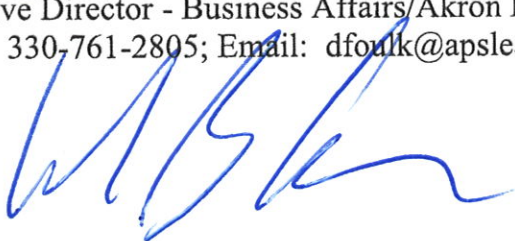
Thank you for taking the time to review this critical information regarding mass transit as proposed by HB 96.

Chair Brenner and members of the committee, we would welcome any questions or opportunities to provide further clarification. You are welcome to contact either of us at our contact information listed below.

Sincerely,



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