



**STARK AREA REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

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SARTAonline.com

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and Members of the Senate Finance Committee: My name is Kirt Conrad, CEO of the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) in Canton, Ohio. We provide fixed route and paratransit services in Stark County and express routes to Akron and Cleveland. Transportation of students to schools and colleges is a large part of our existing ridership. We sell tickets and passes to over 30 schools and educational institutions in our community, including paratransit. Paratransit transports a person from the home to their destination if they have a disability recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act. We provide over 600 trips per day and 30% are educationally related for individuals with a disability.

The requirement in this bill restricts the transferring of students at our downtown transit center impractical but also in conflict with federal law. The amendment's sponsor stated in a press release that students should be transferred from school to home. However, transit systems are not allowed to operate closed door school tripper service. All service needs to be open door with a schedule published for the general public. We attempted to obtain federal approval a couple of years ago to do something very similar with Canton City Schools but were denied. Other systems in the State have issues with this.

If we follow federal law and do allow students to ride, this amendment makes this an arrestable criminal violation. Who gets arrested? Is it the bus operator or me for designing the routes?

If we do follow the proposed law, who will pay for the extra service? In February, we cut nearly twenty percent of our service because of declining revenue. Several employees were laid off and we reduced demand response service for individuals with disabilities, stopping all service at 9:40 pm. Cutting more services is the only way we could add direct service as envisioned by the amendment's sponsor.

