

Minority Report
Conference Committee to SB1630
school buses; student transportation; vehicles
May 16, 2022

We oppose Senate Bill 1630 (school buses; student transportation; vehicles) because the conference committee amendment fails to address fundamental problems in the underlying legislation. SB1630 neither provides sufficient regulation to protect children nor does it adequately address the workforce shortage of qualified school bus drivers.

This legislation weakens safety measures established by the Arizona Department of Public Safety and supported by the Arizona School Risk Retention Trust. The Arizona School Risk Retention Trust is a non-profit corporation that provides Arizona public school districts and community colleges with property and liability coverages and related services. The Trust is officially opposed to SB1630 and recommends the use of school buses for student passenger transportation to and from school.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, federal regulations require that any alternative vehicle with the capacity to transport 10 or more passengers that is sold or leased in place of a school bus meet the safety standards required of school buses. School buses are required to be equipped with flashing red lights, cross-view mirrors, and stop-sign arms. They also have protective seating, high crush standards, rollover protection features, and are designed to be highly visible.¹ During committee testimony, proponents of SB1630 suggested that schools purchase *used* vehicles in order to circumvent federal safety regulations.² We should not be endorsing loopholes in federal law, which undermine student safety.

Students are about 70 times more likely to get to school safely when taking a bus instead of traveling by car or van. That is because school buses are the most regulated vehicles on the road; they are designed to be safer than passenger vehicles in preventing crashes and injuries.³ Allowing 11 to 15-passenger vans to be used for student transportation to and from school is a reckless and shortsighted policy decision by the Legislature. These vehicles are shown to be in greater danger of flipping – particularly when near their weight capacities.⁴

This danger can be amplified when using passenger vans for regular school transportation, as compared to school buses, which are equipped with the proper visibility equipment needed for frequent stops on public roadways. Arizona Revised Statutes §28-857 prohibits drivers from passing a school bus while stopped and displaying the stop sign.⁵ SB1630 does not amend this section of statute to include 11-15 passenger vans – a huge safety risk.

¹ <http://schoolbusfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SafetyFeatures.pdf>

² <https://www.azleg.gov/videoplayer/?eventID=2022021075&startStreamAt=1622> Time Stamp: 48:15

³ <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/school-bus-safety>

⁴ <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/811143>

⁵ <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/28/00857.htm>

According to the federal Fatality Analysis Reporting System, in 2019 there were 593 fatal crashes involving large van vehicles that weigh 10,000 lbs. or less and 32 fatal crashes involving van-based buses that weigh more than 10,000 lbs. – both of which SB1630 authorizes for school transportation use. Compared to 84 fatal crashes involving school buses in 2019.⁶ 57% of the 15-passenger van occupants killed in rollover crashes from 2010-2019 were ejected from the vehicle.⁷

While we understand the spirit of the bill, the current school bus driver shortage is occurring because schools have been forced to make financial choices based on extreme resource and manpower constraints. A more sensible and safer long-term solution would be to fully fund schools to enable them to address the transportation needs of every student. School administrators should not have to decide to utilize the cheaper, hazardous options outlined in SB1630.

The amended bill demonstrates a lack of meaningful stakeholder input involved in drafting SB1630 and a fundamental misunderstanding of federal safety regulations. For these reasons, we oppose SB1630 as amended by the conference committee.



Senator Christine Marsh
Legislative District 28



Representative Jennifer Pawlik
Legislative District 17

⁶ <https://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Vehicles/VehiclesAllVehicles.aspx>

⁷ <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/15-passenger-vans>