

## **Connecticut School Transportation Association**

(COSTA)

Comments on

### **HB 6357 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations on Education**

COSTA has serious concerns about the proposal recommended in section 13 of HB 6357 that would eliminate the state's funding of school transportation to municipalities and replace it with a \$5 million grant to incentivize regional transportation.

There are many aspects that go into the establishment of transportation systems in a given town, including the school calendar, the number of schools and their start times, the number of students and locations where students live. Even snow days, early dismissals and late starts due to the weather factor into play.

Similarly, there are a number of items that go into the pricing of a school contract, including the types of buses that a town chooses to use and the services and equipment they choose to have on them (i.e. monitors, cameras, restraint systems, etc...). They must also factor in the costs of the drivers and their benefits, union contracts, etc...

Each of these components makes each municipality different, and it is hard to match these components if they were to be combined into a multi town bid.

Unless there is a regional school district, savings cannot be made on the number of buses being operated because they are traveling to different schools in different towns. There could potentially be some cost savings on management, if you have several towns under the jurisdiction of one company, but that happens now with the larger companies anyway. They have one management team for all their towns, with local personnel if needed – so these savings are already being achieved.

You could potentially save on property tax and infrastructure if a bus company were allowed to use one central lot to park the buses for several different school districts. However, in practicality, that will not happen because each town wants their own buses garaged within their borders to collect the property tax.

Unless towns have similar holidays, teacher professional days, the same kindergarten schedule (full day vs. half day kindergarten), extracurricular sports schedules, etc..., common bus operations are difficult to achieve.

The magnet and charter schools have separate transportation systems that are operated by the local RESCs. These systems are contracted out generally to larger school bus companies that

run buses in multiple towns to pick students up and transport them to their respective schools. Again, these schools are often several towns away from where the student actually lives, so it is not practical for a bus in the student's hometown to take them to that school. Interestingly enough, the RESC Alliance was asked to study the issue of regional school transportation by the legislature two years ago and reported back many of the problems that are cited in this testimony.

There is really not much more that can be economized out of a school bus contract, contrary to popular belief. We would respectfully disagree that real savings can be achieved by this proposal and it would serve instead to massively disrupt school transportation by eliminating the funding source.

Interestingly enough, Secretary Barnes revealed at the Appropriations Budget presentation on Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> that the state transportation funding for private schools would not be cut, just the funding for public schools. There are several towns that have parochial schools that run a dual system with the public schools and pick up both students on the same bus, dropping them off at their respective schools. This seems like exactly the type of cooperation and cost savings that the proposal is trying to achieve, but it would actually be eliminated. The parochial funding remains while the public funding would be eliminated.

COSTA views this regional school transportation proposal to be short sighted and not well reviewed. We would recommend that the committee restore the public school transportation funding and set up a task force to study better ways to maximize transportation dollars.

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