



**Maria V. Navarro, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Office of the Superintendent**  
301-934-7223  
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September 17, 2024

Dear Charles County Delegation:

On behalf of Charles County Public Schools (CCPS), I urge the Charles County Delegation to reject the legislative proposal from the Charles County School Bus Contractors Association (CCSBCA) concerning the contracts between the school system and private contractors. The legislation is not needed and not in the best interests of Charles County or its citizens.

CCPS currently provides transportation services to our students supported through taxpayer dollars, as overseen by a publicly elected Board of Education. The Board is responsible for ensuring that these taxpayer dollars are used in an effective and efficient manner. It has done this both by directly owning and operating some buses as well as through contracted services provided by 24 private contractors. The terms of these contracts ensure that transportation services are offered throughout the county while at the same time including the necessary revenues for those private contractors to operate and profit from their businesses.

Under the terms of the contracts, the contractors purchase buses for their needs, and CCPS reimburses those costs in full, plus interest, over a six-year period. At the end of the six years, the contractors still retain ownership of the buses despite the full payments by CCPS. These terms, which mirror those in other school systems throughout the state, allow the contractors to maintain services and earn profits while minimalizing risks in purchasing new buses.

In 2023, the General Assembly created the Charles County Task Force to Study School Operator Wages and Contracts, which included a review of best practices and other issues related of the student transportation services offered in Charles County. At the time, the length of the contracts between CCPS and the contractors was one year. One outcome of that study was an agreement by CCPS and the CCSBCA to examine the use of multi-year contracts for privately owned bus contractors starting in the 2023-2024 school year.

Those discussions resulted in an offer by CCPS to use contracts up to six years in length for those contractors fully meeting the needs of the school community. Specifically, based on an evaluation of services the contractors had helped develop for themselves using specific metrics, those contractors who provided the highest-quality services and whose buses fully met all state inspection standards would be offered the six-year contact. Contractors not meeting the highest standards would be offered a shorter term as an incentive to increase their ratings for future years.



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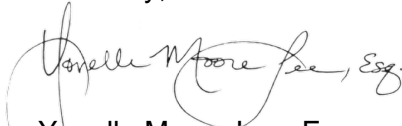
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The six-year terms would have aligned with the six-year reimbursement schedule for the purchase of new buses, thus providing security for the contractors providing quality services. The CCSBCA rejected that offer and instead agreed to contracts for a three-year term for all contractors. Those three-year contracts were signed for the 2023-2024 school year and are currently in place. CCPS intends to honor those contracts for the contractors who continually provide the necessary services. As part of those contracts, CCPS and the CCSBCA agreed to include the evaluation.

The legislative proposal now being offered by the CCSBCA would mandate that CCPS continue contracting with individual contractors for no less than a ten-year period. The CCSBCA's justification is that the change in law would help minimize the risks of operating the private businesses. However, there is no basis for this length of time, and it far exceeds the current length of the contracts. This length of time even exceeds the length of the six-year contracts CCPS had previously offered that the contractors had rejected. Rather than reducing their risks, the guarantees in the proposal would tie the hands of the school system in its efforts to ensure that contracts are only continued for those contractors providing the highest level of services to meet the needs of the community. It would also complicate negotiations for future contracts, adding to the already high costs of transportation services. This proposal does not support the effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars and is not in the best interests of the community. Further, it is unnecessary if the stated intent is to limit risks and protect the investments made by contractors in their businesses, a goal that could be met through the six-year contracts already proposed by the school system.

I urge the Delegation to reject the proposal from the CCSBCA. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Yonelle Moore Lee, Esq.  
Chairperson



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Superintendent of Schools

cc: Board of Charles County Commissioners  
Charles County Board of Education