

**Delaware General Assembly**

**State of Delaware**

**For Immediate Release:**

**May 31, 2022**

**Joint Finance Committee Approves Funding Increase for School Bus Drivers, Public School Transportation**

*Committee boosts funding by $16.9 million for bus drivers, maintenance, other expenses*

DOVER – The budget-writing Joint Finance Committee has approved a substantial increase in funding for public school bus drivers and related programs.

The committee, a 12-member panel of representatives and senators from both parties charged with drafting the state’s operating budget, voted last week to add $16.9 million to address recommendations from the Public School Transportation Committee, a group consisting of legislative and state budget officials, public and charter school personnel, and bus contractor representatives.

As part of the vote, Joint Finance Committee earmarked $11.7 million to increase the minimum hourly rate for bus drivers, $3.8 million for administrative expenses, and $1.4 million to increase the basic maintenance allowance by 30%.

“We rely on bus drivers to safely transport our children from home to school and back every day, and they fulfill that vital role wonderfully. It’s long past time for us to fairly compensate these dedicated workers for their service to our students,” said **Rep. Kim Williams**, a Joint Finance Committee member and chair of the House Education Committee. “In recent years, it has become more difficult to recruit and retain school bus drivers. Boosting their pay has been a priority, and I’m grateful we were able to provide a meaningful increase for our partners in the educational system.”

Concerns about school bus driver shortages have persisted in recent years, with low pay cited as one of the main issues. In approving the funding increase, the Joint Finance Committee directed that funds provided through the school transportation formula to provide hourly rates for bus drivers should to the maximum extent possible go directly toward increasing bus driver salaries and to address workforce shortage and retention issues.

The $11.7 million increase will raise the reimbursement rate to reflect an hourly rate increased from $15.92 per hour to $21 an hour, though the actual amount a contractor pays their drivers could vary.

“School bus drivers are critically important partners in our public education system,” said **Sen. Laura Sturgeon**, chair of the Senate Education Committee and a member of the Joint Finance Committee. “Like all Delawareans, the men and women we trust to safely transport our children to and from school each day deserve to be paid a fair wage. I want to thank my colleagues on JFC for continuing our work to increase bus driver pay, while also keeping pace with the growing expense of gasoline and bus maintenance, to provide the level of service our schools and our neighbors depend on.”

The Joint Finance Committee reviewed and voted on funding priorities for the fiscal 2023 operating budget last week. Legislative budget staff will write the final budget bill, which must be approved by the entire General Assembly in June.

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