

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 968

(Senator Gallion)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Environment and Transportation and
Ways and Means

Education - School Bus - Fire Safety Standards

This bill exempts school bus driver’s seats from the requirement that a school bus must be constructed with materials that enable it to meet all the criteria of the school bus seat upholstery fire block test established by the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures adopted at the most recent National Congress on School Transportation (NCST). **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) can update its safety inspection procedures with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Potential minimal reduction in local school system expenditures for school bus procurement beginning in FY 2027. Local revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: Type I and Type II school vehicles are yellow school buses. Both a Type I and Type II school vehicle must be designed and constructed to carry passengers and meet the same construction and seating space requirements. However, a Type I vehicle must have a gross vehicle weight exceeding 15,000 pounds and a Type II vehicle must have a gross vehicle weight of 15,000 pounds or less.

Under current law, a school bus (defined under Transportation Article § 11-153 as a Type I school vehicle) must be constructed with materials that enable it to meet all the criteria of the school bus seat upholstery fire block test established by the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures adopted at the most recent NCST.

Although current law specifies that only Type I school vehicles are subject to fire block safety tests, Maryland regulations under COMAR 11.19.02.31 and 11.19.03.29 require *passenger seats* on both Type I and Type II school vehicles to be constructed with materials that enable it to meet all the criteria of the school bus seat upholstery fire block test established by the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures adopted at the most recent NCST. For *operator seats*, Maryland regulations only require Type I vehicles to be constructed with such materials.

The [17th NCST](#) convened in 2025 and updated its National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures, which include specifications for a school bus seat upholstery fire block test.

The school bus upholstery fire block test is performed with standardized school bus seating arrangements and ignition sources, which must be placed in each of three designated locations. The current school bus upholstery fire block safety test performance criteria include (1) a maximum time from ignition to flameout of eight minutes; (2) prevention of the flame spreading to any other seat in the test chamber for two of the ignition source positions; and (3) weight loss not to exceed 10% of the pretest weight of padding and upholstery. If the seating is equipped from a seatbelt webbing, such components are exempt from the maximum flameout time requirements provided they meet certain federal motor vehicle safety standards.

Local Expenditures: To the extent exempting driver's seats from fire block materials requirements allows local school systems to procure school buses with less expensive driver seat upholstery, local expenditures decrease. Since the requirement for fire block materials continues to apply to school bus passenger seats, any effect on the overall cost of school bus procurement is likely minimal.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 1610 (Delegate Kerr) - Rules and Executive Nominations.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Transportation; Baltimore City Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 16, 2026
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Analysis by: Michael E. Sousane

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510