



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 2006

Resolution calling upon the New York City Board of Education and New York State agencies to expedite their efforts to reduce emissions from diesel fuel school buses and to purchase new alternative fuel vehicles as quickly as possible to safeguard the health of our schoolchildren.

By Council Members Michels, Oddo, Malave-Dilan, Henry, Linares and Perkins; also Council Members Carrion, Eisland, Espada, Fisher, Foster, Harrison, Leffler, Lopez, Marshall, Miller, Moskowitz, O'Donovan, Quinn, Robinson, Sabini, Abel, Golden and Stabile.

Whereas, The vast majority of the nation's school bus fleets run on diesel fuel; and
Whereas, It is estimated that there are approximately 60,000 school buses in New York State, which is home to more school buses than any other state in the nation; and
Whereas, A significant number of buses that are 15 years of age or older can cause much more pollution than the diesel buses being manufactured today; and
Whereas, Some fleets contain buses manufactured prior to 1977, when federal highway safety standards were adopted; and
Whereas, As a result, some children ride to and from school on some of the highest polluting vehicles on the road today; and
Whereas, A recent report, "No Breathing in the Aisles: Diesel Exhaust Inside School Buses," issued by the Natural Resources Defense Council and Coalition for Clean Air found that a child riding inside diesel school buses may be exposed to high levels of toxic diesel exhaust; and
Whereas, The report states that these children may be exposed to as much as four times the level of toxic diesel exhaust as someone riding in a car ahead of their bus; and
Whereas, It is estimated by the authors of this report that for every one million children riding in a school bus for one or two hours each day during the school year, 23 to 46 children may eventually develop cancer from the diesel exhaust they inhale during those rides; and
Whereas, Aside from its cancer-causing properties, diesel exhaust is also known to be a major source of fine particles that can lodge deep in the lungs and exacerbate asthma, particularly in children who are sensitive; and
Whereas, Children are generally more susceptible to negative health effects of air pollution because their organs are still developing and are far less capable of defending the body from airborne toxins and pollutants; and
Whereas, Cleaner fuel alternatives to diesel buses, such as those that run on natural gas and propane, are widely available and are presently being used by approximately 130 school districts across the country; and
Whereas, Low-sulfur diesel fuel will be available more widely in the future to comply with the rule the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adopted in December 2000 mandating the sale of low-sulfur diesel fuel nationally in 2006; and
Whereas, Kevin P. Gill, Director of Food Services and Transportation for the Board of Education, has reported that state agencies - including the Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York Power Authority and the N.Y. State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) - have proposed "a very ambitious plan" that they will fund "to significantly reduce the particle emissions from diesel school buses" as opposed to purchasing cleaner alternative-fuel vehicles (AFVs); and
Whereas, Federal, state and local governments have set aside funds earmarked exclusively to help public and private school bus fleet operators cover the incremental costs of purchasing AFVs; and
Whereas, New York City school buses are owned and operated by private fleets, which are eligible to apply for the New York City Private Fleet Alternative-Fuel/Electric Vehicle (EV) Program sponsored by NYSERDA, which is currently accepting proposals for \$1.5 million in grants until September 13, 2001; and
Whereas, This program will pay for 40% of the incremental cost of light-duty AFVs and up to 70% of the incremental cost of medium and heavy-duty vehicles; and
Whereas, By combining these incentives with the New York State Alternative Fuel Vehicle Tax Credit, it is possible to purchase an AFV for nearly the same cost as a conventional gasoline or diesel vehicle; and
Whereas, The state's Private Fleet AFV/EV Program was made available for the first time last year and \$378,000 was awarded to three fleets for the purchase of nine heavy-duty trucks and 50 light-duty vehicles that use compressed natural gas; now therefore, be it
Resolved, That the New York City Council calls upon the New York City Board of Education and New York State agencies to expedite their efforts to reduce emissions from diesel fuel school buses and to purchase new alternative fuel vehicles as quickly as possible to safeguard the health of our school children.

LS #4473/ AS

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

TITLE:

A resolution calling upon the New York City Board of Education and New York State agencies to expedite their efforts to reduce emissions from diesel fuel school buses and to purchase new alternative fuel vehicles as quickly as possible to safeguard the health of our school children.

TYPE OF LEGISLATION:

A Resolution

REASONS FOR SUPPORT:

The vast majority of our nation's school bus fleets run on diesel fuel, and with New York State being home to more than 60,000 school buses--which is more than any other state in the nation--it was disturbing to learn that a recent study conducted by the Natural Resources Defense Council revealed that particulate and other harmful matter contained in this fuel can pose serious health implications for our students--from the risk of cancer to exacerbating asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

A significant number of buses that are 15 years of age or older can cause much more pollution than diesel buses that are being manufactured today. Some bus fleets contain buses manufactured prior to 1977, which may translate into some children riding on some of the highest polluting vehicles on the road today. Moreover, it is not the individual riding in the car behind or in front of a diesel school bus that is exposed to harmful emissions, but rather students riding inside a diesel school bus that are being exposed to high levels of toxic diesel exhaust.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, which released a report about the adverse impact these buses pose to our students' health, it is estimated that for every 1 million children riding the school bus for 1 to 2 hours each day during the school year, 23 to 46 children may eventually develop cancer from the excess diesel exhaust they inhale on their way to and from school.

Aside from cancer-causing agents, diesel exhaust is also known to be a major source of fine particles, which can lodge deep in the lungs of children and exacerbate asthma and other respiratory illnesses. Children are generally more susceptible to negative health effects of air pollution because their organs are still developing and are far less capable of defending the body from airborne toxins and pollutants.

However, cleaner fuel alternatives to diesel school buses, such as those that run on compressed natural gas and propane, are currently and widely available, and are being used by a number of school districts across the country.

While the United States Environmental Protection Agency has issued a ruling mandating the future sale of low-sulfur, less harmful diesel fuel to become more widely available in 2006, our students' health cannot be compromised for the next five years, but rather must be protected today by exploring the clean fuel alternatives that are currently available.

New York City school buses, which are owned and operated by private fleets, are eligible to apply for the New York City Private Fleet Alternative Fuel Vehicle (AFV)/Electric Vehicle (EV) Program, which is open until September 13, 2001. This program will pay for 40% of the incremental cost of light-duty Alternative Fuel Vehicles (AFV) and up to 70% of the incremental cost of heavy-duty vehicles. This incentive, combined with the New York State AFV Tax Credit, would make it possible to purchase cleaner modes of transportation for very close to the price of a diesel vehicle.

Approximately 130 school districts across the country are operating natural gas and other alternative fuel school buses to protect their students' health, and therefore I urge support of this resolution, which seeks to explore those alternatives, with the goal of similarly protecting the health and well-being of New York City school students.

Member's signature

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