Honorable Philip D. Murphy

Office of the Governor

225 West State Street

Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy: July 28, 2022

***We urge you to sign S759/A1282 (Diegnan/Greenstein/Stanley/Timberlake/Haider), the electric school bus legislation, into law with a public stand-up event with an electric school bus and to provide funding for this program as quickly as possible. On behalf of the 37 organizations representing diverse constituencies of environmental, labor, community, faith, business and environmental justice organizations, we urge your full support for this legislation.***

The Assembly version of the legislation – A1282 – passed out of the General Assembly in May by a 47-31-1 vote and a similar version of the legislation (S4077) previously passed the Senate in December by a 35-3 vote. The legislation passed out of the Senate Budget Committee last month by an 8-4 vote, and then passed the full State Senate by a 23-15 vote on June 16.

S759/A1282 requires the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to develop and implement a three-year “Electric School Bus Program” (program). The purpose of the program is to determine the operational reliability and cost effectiveness of replacing diesel-powered school buses with electric school buses for daily transportation of students. This bill provides for $15 million in the first year and $15 million annually in two following years to the NJDEP, a total of $45 million, to provide grants to school districts, primarily using dedicated clean energy funds.

This bill has been fully vetted by your office, the legislative sponsors, Senator Patrick Diegnan and Assemblyman Sterley Stanley, the NJDEP and numerous members of the environmental, contractor and educational community. It incorporates suggestions and amendments that will ensure that this program can begin quickly and receive enough funding to help districts in North, Central and South Jersey, including in overburdened urban communities.

***We urge you to sign S759/A1282 into law with a public event and to fund the electric school bus program as quickly as possible for the following reasons:***

***Electric school buses bring a multitude of benefits***.

* They have no tailpipe emissions, so they provide a clean ride to school without diesel fumes infiltrating the bus cabin and the lungs of our school bus drivers and children. A [2019 study](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272775719301530) conducted by researchers from Georgia State University showed that diesel pollution from school buses had a significant negative impact on children’s aerobic capacity and even their academic performance, such as lower test scores. This is especially crucial in environmental justice communities, which already suffer from the cumulative impacts of degraded air quality. The legislation designates half the projects would go to overburdened communities.
* Because electric school buses don’t have tailpipe emissions, they reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If the entire country’s fleet of school buses were replaced with electric alternatives, we could prevent about 5.3 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year. It is critical to note that [electric school buses reduce emissions versus diesel tailpipe emissions](https://blog.ucsusa.org/jimmy-odea/electric-vs-diesel-vs-natural-gas-which-bus-is-best-for-the-climate/), no matter the electric grid, and New Jersey and the benefits on the PJM grid are more substantial than other regions.
* Electric school buses have a lower total cost of ownership than diesel buses due to lower fuel and maintenance costs, and vehicle-to-grid capabilities. A study from the University of Delaware estimates that a school district could save up to [$230,000](http://www1.udel.edu/V2G/resources/V2G-Cost-Benefit-Analysis-Noel-McCormack-Applied-Energy-As-Accepted.pdf) per bus by switching to electric buses.
* Electrifying the state’s fleet of diesel-powered school buses is also a critical step in the Governor’s climate action plans, both through the goals of the Energy Master Plan to reduce pollutants from the transportation sector as well as the commitments on electrification for medium to heavy duty diesel trucks. The goal of this legislation – which is not found in the electrification grants distributed to school districts via RGGI funding – is to flag institutional, operational or policy issues that will need to be addressed so we can scale up the replacement of diesel school buses in the next decade plus.

We must ensure that this is the last generation of children that rides dirty diesel school buses that harm human health and pollute our environment. There are currently zero electric school buses operating in the state, meaning every school bus driver and child who rides the bus to school is being exposed to diesel exhaust, which is known to cause and exacerbate asthma, heart and lung diseases, and lung cancer.

Considering that the upfront cost of electric school buses is still nearly triple the cost of their diesel counterparts, school districts won’t be able to make the transition from diesel to electric currently without financial assistance. We will need to spur investment in the electric school bus market by initially funding the transition to electric school buses for a set of first-adopter school districts. Through grants from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and the Volkswagen “Dieselgate” Settlement, school districts and school bus contractors have acquired 77 electric school buses which should be hitting the roads soon. But we cannot rely on these investments alone. We must ramp up the electric school bus market with increased state investment for the benefit of public health and the environment, and we must start now.

S759 and A1282 are a great way to jumpstart the electric school bus market, provide real world operational experience in districts across the state, and leverage private investment to scale up the market. To reach your Administration’s electrification and climate goals and to protect children from breathing in toxic diesel fumes on their daily rides, we must start electrifying our school buses now.

***Thank you for your consideration and we urge you to sign this legislation with a public event and to give a green light to funding this program as quickly as possible.***

If you have any questions at all, we would be glad to answer them and we would be happy to set up a meeting with you as soon as possible. Please feel free to contact Doug O’Malley, Director, Environment New Jersey at 917-449-6812, domalley@environmentnewjersey.org, Anjuli Ramos-Busot, Director, NJ Sierra Club at 267-399-6422, anjuli.ramos@sierraclub.org, and Melissa Miles, Executive Director, New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance at 973-306-4696, melissa@njeja.org.

Sincerely,

Doug O’Malley, Director

Environment New Jersey

Anjuli Ramos-Busot, Director

New Jersey Sierra Club

Melissa Miles, Executive Director

New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance

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Kevin Dougherty, Steering Committee Member

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William Casey, Environmental Justice Committee

NAACP/MEAB

Keith Voos, Chair, Health, Energy and Pollution Subcommittee

NAACP State Chapter

Eric Miller, NJ Energy Policy Director

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

New Jersey Coalition of Religious Leaders

Rev. Jack Johnson, Coordinator

Tom Gilbert, Co-Executive Director

New Jersey Conservation Foundation

Sean Spiller, President

New Jersey Education Association

Lisa Harrison-Gulla, President

NJ Public Health Association

Ed Potosnak, Executive Director

NJ League of Conservation Voters

Nicole Rodriguez, President

New Jersey Policy Perspective

Matt Casale, Environmental Health Advocate

New Jersey Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG)

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