

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
TEL (916) 651-4014
FAX (916) 327-3523

DISTRICT OFFICES

4974 E. CLINTON WAY
SUITE 100
FRESNO, CA 93727
TEL (559) 253-7122
FAX (559) 253-7127

1308 W. MAIN ST., SUITE C
RIPON, CA 95366
TEL (209) 599-8540
FAX (209) 599-8547

WWW.SEN.CA.GOV/COGDILL

SENATOR.COGDILL@SENATE.CA.GOV

California State Senate

SENATOR
DAVE COGDILL
FOURTEENTH SENATE DISTRICT
SENATE MINORITY WHIP



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COMMITTEE

March 25, 2008

Mary D. Nichols, Chair
California Air Resources Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: March 27 Board Meeting – Agenda Item 08-3-4 School Bus Guidelines

Dear Ms. Nichols:

I am writing with regard to the current ARB proposal for allocation of Proposition 1B money for the replacement of school busses and the installation of traps. Unfortunately, the guidelines proposed by ARB staff will disadvantage rural school districts which already face hardships with public school transportation funding.

Two factors contribute to the special nature of rural school districts with regard to bussing. 1) Rural counties must bus more students for longer distances. The following are a few examples: Kern County (32% of their students) Nevada (49%), Inyo (54%), Trinity (57%), Mariposa (74%), and Amador (77%). 2) In rural areas, school districts already bear the brunt of school transportation funding. For example, in Kern County, schools in 2005 spent \$34 million for transportation but only received \$14 million from the state.

The school bus guidelines proposed by ARB staff will further increase costs to rural areas by requiring a school district match of \$25,000. There was nothing in the voter-approved proposition or in the enabling legislation requiring such a match. Because of financial troubles already facing rural school districts, this blanket local match will cause them to have difficulties competing for the Prop 1B funding.

While a cap on the state's share is appropriate, the proposed cap of \$140,000 per school bus does not seem to be realistic. Because of the higher cost of CNG school busses, the local school district's 'match' would be approximately \$30,000 to \$45,000. With the exception of the South Coast air quality district, which mandates CNG school busses, this will have the unintended consequence of causing school districts to purchase diesel school busses because of the lower price and therefore the lower school district match.

Finally, I would support the position that at least 75% of the Proposition 1B funds be used for school bus replacement. Because of the lack of funding, rural school districts have some of the oldest school bus fleets in the nation. These funds will replace school busses that on the average were built more than thirty years ago. The California State Department of Education has stated that school busses should be replaced before fifteen years of service.

For all these reasons, I urge you to consider the impact that the proposed guidelines will have on rural areas and ask that you not approve the staff's proposed guidelines on Agenda Item 08-3-4 School Bus Guidelines. Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Yours truly,

Dave Cogdill
Dave Cogdill

Senator, District 14