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March 26, 2008

Mary D. Nichols, Chair
California Air Resources Board (ARB)
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Board Meeting on March 27th: Agenda Item 08-3-4 School Bus Guidelines

Dear Chair Nichols:

As representative of twelve rural counties, I have concerns regarding the proposed School Bus Guidelines that were presented at the board meeting on March 27, 2008. These guidelines affect the distribution of \$200 million from Prop 1B for the replacement of school buses and the installation of traps. The proposed actions have the potential to severely hurt my rural school districts, which already face numerous hardships: one being in the area of transportation.

Rural counties must bus more students for longer distances. The following counties in my district are a couple of examples: Nevada (49%) and Trinity (57%). The school bus guidelines that ARB is proposing would further increase costs to rural areas. I am strongly opposed to the proposal for a school district match of \$25,000. There was nothing in the voter-approved proposition or in the enabling legislation that gives ARB the authority to require such a match. If ARB is going to require a match, ARB should introduce legislation to obtain this authority.

Additional costs rural school districts are going to have is due to seat belt requirements. Many districts seat three children to a seat in order to minimize costs. This requirement means these same districts will no longer be able to seat three to a seat and will have to purchase new school buses and hire additional drivers. Their actual "match" will exceed \$100,000 per replacement bus.

I am also opposed to the unrealistic state cost cap of \$140,000 per school bus. This cap means school districts purchasing a CNG school bus will have to pay a "match" of \$30,000 - \$45,000.

This cap has the unintended consequence of school districts having to purchase diesel buses due to the lower match. Another unintended consequence is school districts having to purchase "fully loaded" diesel school buses costing up to \$165,000 (state share of \$140,000 plus district match of \$25,000).

I have no problem with reasonable cost caps that reflect actual costs of school buses. I recommend ARB give this authority to the local Air Quality Districts and have them create reasonable cost caps based on the most recent school bus purchases by school districts within each Air Quality District's boundaries.

Lastly, I would encourage the ARB recommend to Air Quality Districts that a minimum of 75% of Prop 1B funds be used for school bus replacement. Because school transportation programs have been severely underfunded, school districts have not been able to replace aging school buses. On average, these buses are thirty years old.

I urge you to consider the impacts the proposed guidelines will have on rural areas and ask you not to approve Agenda Item 08-3-4 School Bus Guidelines. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at (916) 651-4004.

Sincerely,



Sam Aanestad
Senator, 4th District

ORIGINAL:
Copies:

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Chair