



# NEW HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## Greetings Senator Cohen, Representative Lemar, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Jeffrey Sousa and I serve as the Superintendent of New Hartford Public Schools. I am writing in support of **SB 416**, which makes important updates to Connecticut's transportation statutes, including provisions related to **zero-emission school buses, transportation infrastructure modernization, and state support for districts transitioning to cleaner transportation systems.**

As a superintendent of a small rural school district, student transportation is one of the most essential, and most expensive, operational responsibilities we manage. The expectation to build and sustain infrastructure for electric only bus transportation is not feasible, nor reliable in our rural environment. I am also concerned with the life cycle of electric batteries and their ability to function in colder temperatures. Every day, our buses travel significant distances to safely transport students across our community. Policies that support safe, reliable, and modern transportation systems are critical to both student safety and district sustainability.

The provisions in SB 416 addressing **zero-emission and alternative fuel school buses and the associated grant programs for purchasing or leasing these vehicles** are particularly important. Transitioning school bus fleets to cleaner technologies aligns with Connecticut's environmental goals and has the potential to improve air quality for students who ride buses daily. However, the cost of these vehicles remains significantly higher than traditional diesel buses. Without meaningful state support and flexibility, many smaller districts simply cannot afford to participate in this transition.

SB 416 helps address this challenge by continuing to develop programs that support districts financially as they modernize their fleets. Ensuring that school districts have access to **grants, rebates, and flexible eligibility requirements** will allow more communities, including rural districts like New Hartford, to participate in these initiatives without placing an additional burden on local taxpayers.

Additionally, the bill's focus on **modernizing transportation infrastructure and equipment** is an important investment in safety and efficiency. Updated systems for traffic signals and transportation coordination can reduce delays, improve traffic flow around schools, and enhance overall safety for students, families, and staff.

From a district perspective, legislation like SB 416 recognizes that transportation is a core component of educational access. Students cannot learn if they cannot safely and reliably get to school. Supporting modern, environmentally responsible, and financially feasible transportation systems is therefore an investment in both public safety and public education.

On behalf of New Hartford Public Schools, I respectfully encourage the committee to **support** SB 416 and continue to provide school districts with the tools and resources needed to **modernize** transportation systems while **protecting** local taxpayers. Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to Connecticut's students and communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Sousa, Superintendent of Schools