

February 2, 2021

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

CC: Jon Niermann, Chairman, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Dear Governor Abbott,

We write to ask you to protect children's health by helping school districts replace dirty diesel school buses with clean electric buses. Specifically, we request that you reallocate unspent funds from the Texas Volkswagen Environmental Mitigation Program towards the "Grants for School Buses, Shuttle Buses, and Transit Buses" program, exclusively for electric buses, and support full funding for, and improvements to, the Texas Emissions Reduction Program Clean School Bus Program in the upcoming legislative session.

As parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members, we are very concerned with the daily exposure of our children to toxic diesel exhaust.

Approximately 95 percent of school buses, carrying some of the most vulnerable passengers, run on diesel. Numerous studies have shown that inhaling diesel exhaust can cause respiratory diseases and worsen existing conditions like asthma¹. The negative effects are especially pronounced in children.

Diesel exhaust is internationally recognized as a cancer-causing agent² and classified as a likely carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In a study of 61 million people in 2015, researchers found that exposure to diesel soot and ground-level ozone created by diesel exhaust was linked to higher rates of mortality. New diesel still has some of these negative emissions.

A new study from the Brookings Institute analyzed 2,656 school bus retrofits in Georgia which reduced harmful emissions by 95%. Approximately 750,000 students were part of this data set each year from 2007-2017. Researchers saw significant improvements in students' respiratory health, with twice the benefit for elementary students, whose younger age increases their vulnerability. The study also found strong evidence of academic improvements after the change, most significantly noted in English test scores³.

¹ Liu NM, Grigg J. Diesel, children and respiratory disease. *BMJ Paediatr Open*. 2018;2(1):e000210. Published 2018 May 24. doi:10.1136/bmjpo-2017-000210

² World health Organization www.iarc.fr/wpcontent/uploads/2018/07/pr213_E.pdf

³ Austin, W., Heutel, G. and Kreisman, D., 2019. School bus emissions, student health and academic performance. *Economics of Education Review*, 70, pp.109-126.

Getting to school shouldn't include a daily dose of toxic pollution or increase the chances that people will get sick. The good news is that Texas can clean up its buses by making them electric. All-electric buses are here, and they're cleaner, healthier and often cheaper for transit agencies, school districts and bus contractors to run in the long-term. To clear our air and protect our health, we urge you to help accelerate the replacement of diesel and other fossil fuel-powered buses with clean, electric buses.

Dramatic declines in battery costs and improvements in performance, including expanded driving range, have made electric buses a viable alternative to diesel-powered and other fossil fuel buses. Additionally electric school buses have no tailpipe emissions.

There is significant demand for clean school buses. TCEQ awarded \$56,962,317 from the VW Grants for School Buses, Shuttle Buses, and Transit Buses, compared to \$84,840,054 requested.⁶ The program was extremely popular and was the only VW grant round to run out of funding. The others haven't even come close.

However, those funds went almost exclusively to new diesel buses. Proposals for electric buses often take longer to prepare, given the necessity to coordinate with electric utilities and plan for new infrastructure. As a result, we need a new program which gives school districts interested in electric buses the ability to properly compete.

Everman ISD (near Fort Worth) received the only VW grant for electric buses. Each electric school bus is saving the District nearly \$2,000 a year in fuel and \$4,400 a year in reduced maintenance costs, saving tens of thousands of dollars over the lifetime of a bus. While the total lifetime cost of an electric school bus is lower than a diesel bus because of these fuel savings,⁴ electric school buses do have a higher upfront cost. State grants can mitigate the upfront cost and help school districts save money during these difficult times.

We respectfully request you take the following actions to help more Texas school districts buy electric buses:

- Reallocate unspent Texas VW funds to an additional funding round that will be open only to electric buses.
- Support \$22 million in funding for the Clean School Bus Program. In the last biennium, the clean school bus program got \$6.2 million. Under HB 3745⁵ funding for the Clean School Bus Program's budget will increase to as much as \$22 million in the new biennium, as long as budget writers don't use the clean air funds for other purposes. The Legislature should also amend the program to specifically encourage electric buses.

4

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/energyinnovation/2018/05/21/electric-buses-can-save-americas-local-governments-billions-chinas-showing-us-how-its-done/?sh=6011987b5f78>

⁵ <https://house.texas.gov/news/press-releases/?id=7072>

⁶ https://www.tceq.texas.gov/assets/public/implementation/air/terp/VW/TxVEMP_Buses_Status_4.27.2020.pdf

We request the opportunity to meet with you or your staff to discuss in greater detail our ideas for protecting children's health by investing in electric school buses.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
Executive Director, Environment Texas

Douglas Becker
Managing Director of Transportation, Frisco ISD

Rebecca Hallmark
Superintendent, Garner ISD

Kiley Zylman
School board Trustee, Garner ISD

Sarah Pennebaker
Trustee, Garner ISD School Board

David Brower
Trustee, Garner ISD

BJ Carlton
Director of Operations, Garner ISD

Kathy Wakefield
Teacher, Garner ISD

Diane Shaw
Principal, Garner ISD

Terry Penn
Director of Transportation, Rockwall ISD

Bill Powell
Assistant Superintendent for Support Services, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

Greg Fletcher
Director of Operations, Paradise ISD

Andrew Dillon
Innovation Fellow, West Monroe

Patrick A Cardoza
Director, Kaufman ISD

Kayne Smith
Director of Transportation Services, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

Aaryaman Singhal
Environment and Sustainability Committee, Dallas ISD

Molly Rooke
Environment and Sustainability Committee, Dallas ISD

Jessica House
Environment and Sustainability Committee, Dallas ISD

Mellen West
Environment and Sustainability Committee, Dallas ISD

Paul Saldana
Former School Board Trustee, Austin ISD

Jason Gillis
Transportation Director, Everman ISD

Jack Youngkin
Director of Transportation, Garland ISD

Arati Singh
Trustee, Austin ISD (signing for myself)

Sandra Holliday
Manager, Houston-Galveston Area Council

Steve McKee
Executive Director, Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility

Catherine Flowers
Texas Field Organizer, Moms Clean Air Force

Bay Scoggin
Director, TexPIRG

Bakeyah Nelson
Executive Director, Air Alliance Houston

Mike Herschenfeld
CEO, BlueScope Group

Michael J. Osborne
Chair Board of Directors, Texas Transportation Resources Alliance (TxETRA)

Hanna Mitchell
Program Director, Solar United Neighbors

Jimmy W. Hosch
Team Leader, 350 Dallas

Bill Betzen
Postmaster and Retired Teacher, School Time Capsule Project

Noelita Lugo
AISD At-Large Trustee Position 8, Austin ISD

Lynn Boswell
District 5 Representative, Austin ISD