Subject: Protecting Student Health Through Electric School Bus Transition

Dear Trustee / Minister,

I am writing as a parent/caregiver and member of the York Region school community to ask that the health of our children and families remain a top priority in decisions related to student transportation.

While some risks, such as wildfire smoke, are beyond our control, there is one daily exposure that we *can* address: diesel exhaust from school buses. Each school day, approximately 56,000 students in York Region ride diesel-powered buses, where they are exposed to fine particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and other pollutants — the very same toxic components also found in wildfire smoke.

Health Canada and environmental health research link diesel emissions to serious respiratory conditions, asthma attacks and bronchitis, leading to increased hospital visits. Children are especially vulnerable because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air relative to their size than adults. Diesel exhaust is classified as a known carcinogen. York Region students have experienced some of the highest asthma rates in Ontario for more than a decade. Reducing preventable sources of air pollution should be one of the most practical steps we can take to protect them.

Electric school buses offer a realistic path forward. Over a typical 12-year lifespan, electrifying a single bus can yield substantial health benefits. In Canadian analyses the estimated lifetime savings in avoided health-care costs due to reduced respiratory and chronic illness are on the order of around $12,000 per bus, depending on local air quality and health impact assumptions. U.S. research shows even larger lifetime health benefits in more polluted areas, framing this on a *per bus, per lifetime* basis is the standard methodology used in health economic studies for electric school buses.

If Ontario's roughly 20,000 school buses were electric, the *aggregate* health benefits and societal cost savings could reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars over the life of those vehicles.

Yet Ontario's uptake of electric school buses remains slow. When the provincial pilot funding ended in 2018, the gap between the higher upfront cost of electric buses and what school boards could afford widened significantly. While federal programs have provided some support since then, the available funding alone has not been enough to enable large-scale fleet transition. In contrast, Quebec has made far larger commitments to school bus electrification, including a $400 million investment through the Canada Infrastructure Bank and provincial programs to support the purchase of thousands of zero-emission school buses and charging infrastructure, tied to a policy goal of electrifying approximately 65 % of the province's fleet by 2030. Quebec also provides subsidies of up to $240,000 per electric bus purchase under its electrification program to lower the upfront cost for operators. Quebec now has *a significantly*

larger electric school bus fleet compared to Ontario's, where only a few dozen buses are electric despite Ontario having the largest school bus fleet in Canada.

Another provincial comparison is British Columbia, which has also implemented targeted funding incentives which includes direct provincial contributions to support school districts to purchase electric buses and pairs them with federal funding opportunities to accelerate uptake. These provincial examples show that with coordinated policy support and financial incentives, school bus electrification can be scaled more rapidly to protect children's health.

I can understand that the cost barrier is real when a diesel school bus now typically costs roughly $90,000–$120,000 upfront while an electric school bus can cost $300,000–$400,000 or more. Although electric buses have lower fuel and maintenance costs over time, this initial price difference remains a major barrier for operators.

If the province were to help bridge that upfront gap through incentives, shared-cost funding, or targeted infrastructure support, school boards and operators would be in a far stronger position to transition their fleets without undue financial strain. Provinces such as Quebec and others have taken this approach. It is reasonable to ask whether Ontario would be further ahead today had provincial support for electric school bus adoption not been withdrawn after pilot programs ended in 2018.

School boards and the province each have important roles to play. Boards can set expectations within transportation contracts and fleet planning, while the province can provide the funding framework, policy direction, and incentives that make large-scale transition achievable.

As a parent / caregiver, I believe this is ultimately about the air our children breathe every day. Protecting their health and supporting the health of families and school staff should not depend solely on long-term fuel savings calculations but if that is the focus, the transition would still eventually pay off. The bonus is that it would also help pollution and our commitment to positive climate action.

Can you please outline what specific steps you or your office will take in the next year to accelerate the transition to electric school buses and reduce students' exposure to diesel emissions?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Top Impactful Sources (for citation list)

1. “Powering Up: The Path to Electric School Bus Adoption in Canada” — Canadian Electric School Bus Alliance (2025 recommendations report).

2. Canada Infrastructure Bank: Quebec Zero-Emission School Buses Program ($400 M) — supports electrification of ~3,500 buses and charging infrastructure.

3. Quebec School Bus Subsidy Policy Renewed (2025) — $240,000 per bus subsidy, aiming for 65 % electrification by 2030.