

To: Selected Members of the Advisory Committee
Public Policy Committee Members
Knights of Columbus
Diocesan Communication Directors

From: George V. Corwell, Ed.D.
Director: Office of Education

Date: December 1, 2016

Re: Action Alert Asking for Increased Funding for Nonpublic School Transportation

Enclosed is an Action Alert dedicated to raising the ceiling for nonpublic school transportation. The Alert focuses on Governor Christie increasing funding in the Fiscal Year 2018 State Budget.

In addition, there is an enclosed Fact Sheet which explains the issue in greater detail for those individuals who wish to elaborate on the problem.

Any schools or other groups planning to be at the State House in the next two months should deliver letters or petitions to Governor Christie's office regarding the issue.

This Alert should be considered an ongoing effort and not simply a single response to the Governor's Office. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to call on me.

Thank you for your help in this effort.

GVC:ac

Emailed Communication

ACTION ALERT

ISSUE: Nonpublic school transportation continues to be hampered by a number of problems which emphasize the major difficulties that nonpublic school parents face in attempting to get safe rides to school for their children. The major problem has been the failure of the State to increase the ceiling for nonpublic school transportation funding the 2007-2008 school year. An enclosed Fact Sheet explains the problem in greater detail.

OUR POSITION: The New Jersey Catholic Conference and the New Jersey Network of Catholic School Families support every attempt to provide equitable transportation services for nonpublic school pupils. The focus of this Alert (and in this phase of the Budget cycle) is to ask Governor Christie to increase the \$884.00 ceiling for nonpublic school transportation.

ACTION: Call, write, or email the office of Governor Chris Christie at the address listed below. Parents should be strongly encouraged to tell their stories in great detail with regard to how their children face greater challenges in getting to school than their neighbors' children who go to public school. We encourage group letter writing sessions in schools and efforts to contact members of the Governor's staff that you may know personally with regard to this concern. Please note that this initiative is focused strictly on the Governor at this time because the Legislature will not begin developing a Budget until the Governor's Budget has been presented in February.

Address: The Honorable Chris Christie
Governor of the State of New Jersey
The State House
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Phone: (609) 292-6000

Email: <http://www.nj.gov/governor/contact/>

Or

You can also contact Governor Christie through the NJCC Voter Voice System
at
<http://njcatholic.org/faith-in-action?vvsrc=%2fCampaigns%2f48691%2fRespond>

Nonpublic School Transportation Fact Sheet

- Nonpublic school transportation is provided up to a statutory ceiling of \$884.00 per student. Public schools districts will typically use their own vehicles first for public school students, and then, if any vehicles and drivers are available, will transport nonpublic school students. Thus, the majority of nonpublic school transportation occurs through private contractors. Public school transportation has no per-pupil ceiling for transportation, although public school transportation costs less because students are generally located within a more concentrated geographical area. Therefore, the cost of the routes is less than those for nonpublic school students because transportation depends upon the number of miles traveled by the bus and the number of stops. *However, no eligible public school student will be denied a ride due to cost.*
- Even though transportation costs should logically decrease because of the recent drop in fuel costs, bus owners contend that rising costs for insurance and salaries (many contractors are using unionized workers) are the problem.
- A significant number of public school transportation coordinators and bus company owners have told our administrators and parents that the ceiling **MUST** be raised, or our students may not be able to receive transportation.
- Nonpublic schools have attempted a variety of options in order to maintain transportation within the \$884.00 per pupil ceiling. These include the following:
 - Centralized stops,
 - Changes in arrival and dismissal times in our schools,
 - Having routes bid at fewer than 180 days (i.e. 176, 175) in order to have transportation for student during the majority of days the school is in session.
 - Mixing public and nonpublic schools students on busses.

We have run out of ideas in this regard. The only remaining solution is to raise the per-pupil amount.

- The transportation statute authorizing the per-pupil amount calls for an annual increase, in direct proportion to the increase in the State transportation aid per pupil in the year prior to the pre-budget year compared to the amount for the pre-budget year or by the CPI, whichever is greater (N.J.S.A. 18A: 39-1a). Both the Corzine Administration and the Christie Administration have frozen this amount, thus ignoring the requirement for any annual increase. If the increases required by statute and tied to the annual changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) had been followed, the ceiling would now be \$1,047.00.
- It is important for parents to tell their own frustrating stories of what has happened in recent years in their attempts to have their children transported to a nonpublic school.
- We recognize that some of the problems have been caused by a lack of knowledge/competency on the part of district personnel and a state-wide shortage of drivers and buses. The New Jersey Catholic Conference and others have been working to deal with those issues. However, the contrast between transporting public school students (some of whom are neighbors of our children) and nonpublic school children needs to be described in real terms and in detail to the Governor.