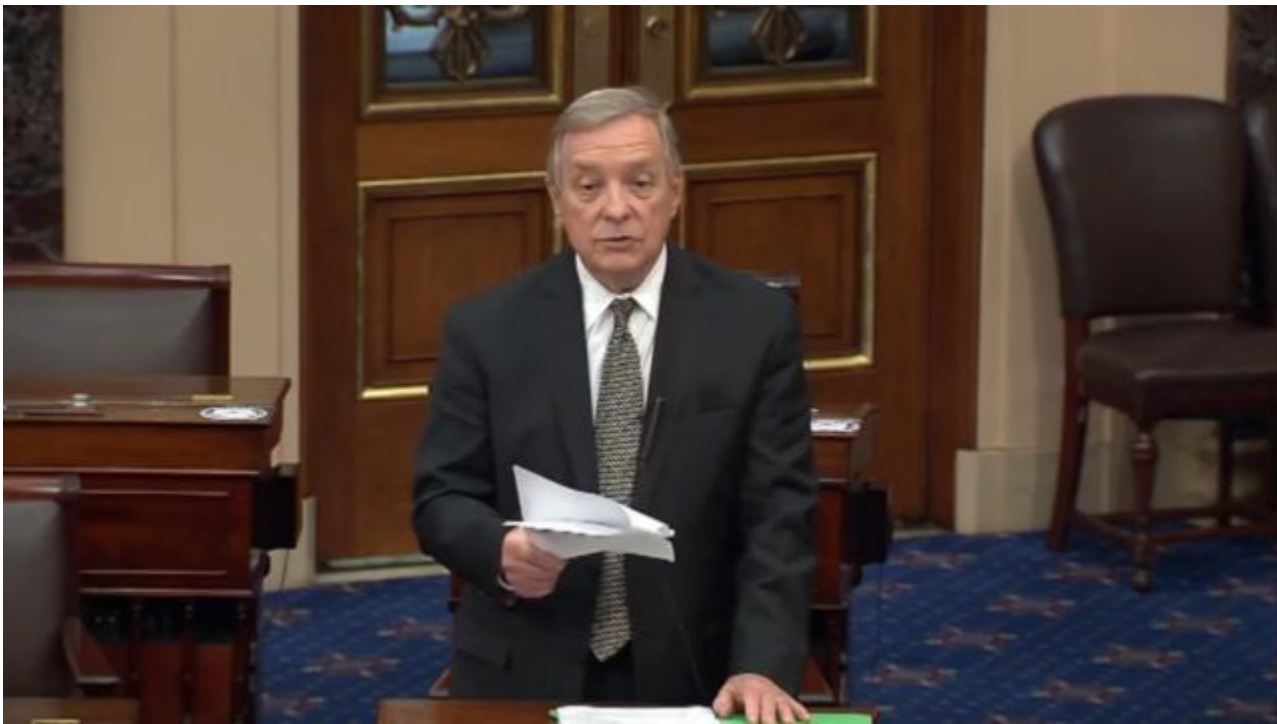


Durbin, Schakowsky, Chicago Delegation Urge Epa To Expand Eligibility Guidelines For Clean School Bus Program

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CHICAGO – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-9) today led 12 of their Illinois colleagues in sending a letter to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Michael Regan urging him to expand eligibility for the new EPA Clean School Bus Program (CSBP) to improve its accessibility to Chicago-area schools and correct additional oversights in the

implementation process. The program, a \$5 billion effort established under the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, aims to convert the nation's school bus fleets to low- and zero-emission vehicles.

“This new program offers an unprecedented opportunity to begin transitioning our nation's school bus fleet to clean, low- and zero-emission vehicles, but it has come to our attention that the current design of the program may present challenges for Illinois schools,” the lawmakers began.

Within CSBP's implementation process, schools would have to first provide a diesel bus for scrapping before receiving funding for new transportation. This design could put school districts, many of which do not own their own buses, in competition to locate and purchase a school bus for disposal. As a result, schools may be barred from access to CSBP funds because of limited resources to secure a bus for scrapping.

“Some Chicago-area school districts, including Proviso, Rich Township, Lindop, Prairie Hills, Waukegan, and others are interested in applying to this new program but may be locked out due to EPA-imposed scrappage requirements that run contrary to the intention of the law. We also are troubled by the exclusion of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) from the list of priority school districts... Districts will have to spend time seeking and potentially paying for a bus (or buses) to scrap when their time and resources would more productively be spent working with utilities to identify and plan for building up charging infrastructure. This is a barrier to applying and could arbitrarily drive up the value of diesel buses, further limiting access. It unnecessarily pits school districts against one another in a scramble for old buses and runs contrary to the spirit of the program, which seeks to promote equitable access and reduce harmful emissions for as many schools as possible” the lawmakers wrote.

The lawmakers also urged Administrator Regan to revisit the use of Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates to determine who is on the priority list for CSBP. Under CSBP's current eligibility requirements, 20 percent of the district's student population must be below the poverty line to be on the priority list. CPS currently has 19.9 percent of its student population under the poverty line. While sub-districts and specific schools within CPS meet this benchmark, these schools are not eligible for CSBP because EPA only measures by entire school districts. The lawmakers urged Administrator Regan to correct the complication to allow more Chicago-area schools to qualify for the program.

“The model chosen by EPA prevents entire districts that have thousands of predominantly Black and Brown students below the poverty line from receiving priority treatment. CPS serves more low-income students (many of whom live in areas suffering from poor air quality) than the entire student body in many districts included on the priority list. Relegating CPS to the non-priority pool disadvantages thousands of

students who the law is specifically designed to assist. We strongly encourage EPA to allow large districts like CPS to apply for sub-districts and designated schools (e.g., transportation zones or attendance areas with more than 20% of students below the poverty rate) as if they are on the priority list,” the lawmakers concluded.

Joining Durbin and Schakowsky on the letter are U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U.S. Representatives Bobby Rush (D-IL-1), Robin Kelly (D-IL-2), Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL-8), Mike Quigley (D-IL-5), Jesús G. "Chuy" García (D-IL-4), Sean Casten (D-IL-6), Bradley Schneider (D-IL-10), Marie Newman (D-IL-3), Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14), Danny Davis (D-IL-7), and Bill Foster (D-IL-11).

Earlier this week, Durbin sent a [letter](#) informing more than 300 Illinois school district administrators that their districts are eligible for the first round of funding for the CSBP. EPA has opened applications for the initial \$500 million in funding, prioritizing applicants that serve significant populations of students living below the poverty line.

Durbin has long been an outspoken supporter of electric vehicles. Earlier this year, he secured \$2.5 million through the omnibus appropriations bill in new federal funding to support electric vehicle infrastructure and workforce training that will lead to good paying jobs in the electrical industry.

The *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which was supported by both Durbin and Duckworth, included more than \$7.5 billion for the construction of a national EV charging network. The legislation also included more than \$17 billion in funding in Illinois in addition to several billion dollars available through competitive grant processes. Illinois will receive \$149 million for EV infrastructure and be eligible for a further \$2.5 billion in competitive funds.

A copy of the letter is available [here](#).