

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of**

**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Kathy Castor**

***Hearing on “Making the Grade?: Audit of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean School Bus Program”***

**September 13, 2023**

Replacing dirty, diesel school buses with clean electric school buses is a win, win, win scenario. Clean school buses reduce the risk of asthma for the kids who ride the bus. Clean electric school buses are less expensive to operate for school districts and save taxpayers money. And clean buses improve the air we breathe by reducing pollution that fouls the air and exacerbates climate change. This initiative is so important (and popular) that I am pleased that the committee is diving in early to ensure that safeguards are in place for school districts, taxpayers and students. The Clean School Bus Program already is delivering results across the country, and I am proud that the Energy and Commerce Committee spearheaded the initiative through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law responding directly to our community’s needs.

In addition to the EPA Inspector General (IG), the subcommittee would have benefited from the perspective of school districts, parents’ groups like the Mom’s Clean Air Task force, and EPA leaders about the importance of modernizing America’s school bus fleet with cleaner, cheaper electric buses.

Instead, we are hearing from the EPA’s Office of the Inspector General just six months after the office announced it would undertake an initial audit, long before we have any actual results. The IG’s written testimony says its review is “incomplete”, so Republicans are holding today’s hearing without any new facts or any official findings. Other perspectives would have been particularly helpful at this point.

While I look forward to learning more about the IG’s audit in the future, we also should use this opportunity to highlight the benefits and popularity of clean electric school buses and ensure that students across America share in the benefits- rural and urban.

School bus fleets in the United States are largely powered by fossil fuels. Aging diesel school buses pollute the air we breathe and are a known threat to public health. Diesel emissions contribute to smog, and regular exposure can increase lifetime cancer risk, lead to chronic respiratory illnesses, and exacerbate lung and cardiovascular conditions. According to EPA, children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of diesel emissions, which can interfere with brain development and worsen childhood asthma.

Recognizing these risks, Congress acted decisively by including the Clean School Bus Program in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Building on EPA’s past efforts to protect children and the public from air pollution, this initiative helps schools phase out their oldest school buses

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and replace them with low- and zero-emission clean school buses. The Clean School Bus Program is helping schools make smart, long-term investments that save them money, while providing students with safer and healthier transportation options. Our children should be able to get to school every day safely and without being exposed to toxic air.

The air pollution emitted by old school buses also intensifies the climate crisis. Early reports show that this past summer was the hottest on record, and we certainly felt it in Florida. Seawater along the tip of Florida exceeded hot tub temperatures of 100F degrees Fahrenheit, making it potentially the hottest ever measured. Everyday we witness the terrible human and economic toll that severe weather and natural disasters are exacting upon communities across the country and around the globe.

That is why the Clean School Buses are so important, advancing the nation toward the climate goals we need to reach in order to prevent the most severe effects of climate change. Notably, replacing a diesel bus with an electric bus can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 200 thousand pounds, according to some estimates.

On top of the health and climate benefits, clean school buses help schools save money. One Missouri school district that received an award expects to save \$25,000 on fuel costs this year alone by replacing 5 school buses. Three school districts serving communities in Florida were awarded more than \$15 million to replace 39 old buses with zero-emission electric school buses that are cheaper to operate and maintain than the fossil fuel buses they are replacing.

It is no wonder that demand for clean school buses is tremendous. EPA received thousands of applications for rebates for the first round of awards, and more than 90 percent of those applications were for zero-emission, electric school buses. So far, EPA has awarded nearly \$1 billion in rebates to replace thousands of school buses and the demand for more remains incredibly high. The enthusiasm we saw during the first round of awards has continued into the second round of applications, and EPA is now going through the process of awarding \$500 million more in grant awards.

So I support constructive oversight to help EPA with its work and make sure that our every dollar spent goes towards helping our schools and our kids, and I know the Inspector General will be an important partner.

Early signs show that this initiative is succeeding and, with Congress's support and hard work from the EPA, it will continue to succeed. Our children, our schools, and our communities are counting on it.

Thank you. I yield back.