



June 10, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttegieg  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttegieg:

On behalf of the American Bus Association (ABA), I wish to bring to your attention a matter of grave concern. As you know, this is a year of a national Presidential election, which includes the scheduling of nominating conventions by national parties. However, as has often occurred in the past, efforts are underway to deny private bus operators a fair opportunity to compete to provide public transportation services for these events, in compliance with federal law. We seek your involvement in this matter, specifically, to ensure compliance with federal law regarding the provision of charter bus services and a fair opportunity for private businesses to participate in the economic returns generated by these national events.

The ABA is the leading trade association representing the private over-the-road bus and motorcoach industry with over 3,800 members, of which approximately 1,000 are motorcoach operators. The ABA's bus operator members provide all manner of motorcoach transportation services throughout the United States, including charter services.

Federal law specifically provides private bus operators protection from unfair competition by federally subsidized public transit operators under regulations referred to as the charter regulations (49 Code of Federal Regulations Part 604). Charter bus services are explicitly protected under these rules as an inherently private bus function, which is an entirely separate function from the purpose of publicly subsidized transit services, which are intended to provide scheduled bus services on designated routes to the public within a defined urban area.

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is now seeking an exemption from these federal protections to thwart private bus operators' opportunity to compete for service contracts in support of the Democratic National Convention, to be held in Chicago, IL, on August 19-22, 2024. The CTA filed its petition with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) seeking this exemption on May 17, 2024, and we urge you to review this matter and ensure the federal

charter regulations are strictly adhered to, for the protection of the private bus industry.

In contrast to CTA's action, no such exemption has been sought from the federal charter rules for the Republican National Convention, occurring on July 15-18, 2024, within the same geographic region (Milwaukee, WI). The CTA's exemption request appears conspicuously inappropriate, considering both events project similar numbers of attendees and similar transportation needs.

We do not believe the CTA has met its responsibilities under the federal charter regulations and therefore its petition for exemption should be denied. Congress never intended for publicly subsidized bus operations to unfairly compete with private bus operators. As is well established in legislative history, public bus operations were intended to supplement or gap fill, where private operations were economically infeasible. This is entirely not the case in supporting major economic activities such as political or business conventions. In fact, convention transportation is specifically within the purview of private charter bus operators.

The CTA petition should be denied, and we urge your oversight in this matter. As Secretary over all modes of transportation it is critical to have your involvement. I am available and welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you. I may be reached at (202) 218-7229 or [ppantuso@buses.org](mailto:ppantuso@buses.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter J. Pantuso". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear "J" and "P".

Peter Pantuso  
President & CEO  
American Bus Association

CC: Mr. Subash Iyer, FTA Chief Counsel/Acting US DOT Chief Counsel; Ms. Kathy Breeden, FTA Charter Ombudsman; Ms. Kelley Brookins, FTA Region 5 Administrator; Ms. Judith Kaleta, US DOT Deputy General Counsel; Ms. Sarah Baker, US DOT Deputy General Counsel