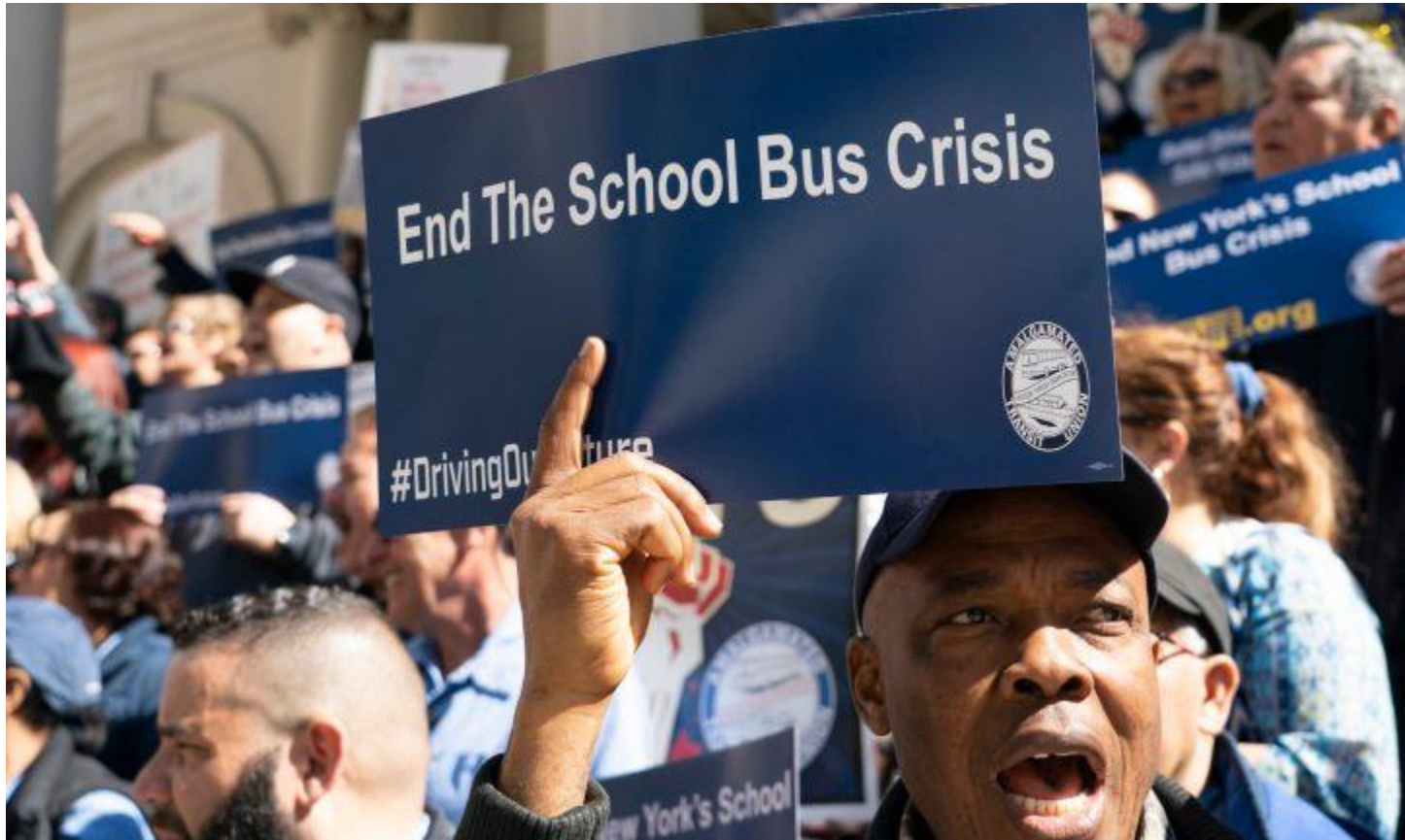


NYC school bus drivers threaten strike over seniority, wage protections

"There is no cost for the safety of our children," said the president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181.



School bus drivers rally at City Hall on Wednesday for wage and benefit protections. Photo Credit: Charles Eckert

School bus drivers are mulling a strike if Albany doesn't restore benefits and protections for its union's most experienced members.

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181 members and elected officials rallied at City Hall Wednesday to call on the governor and state Legislature to reinstate Employee Protection Provisions, or EPP, for school bus drivers. The provisions, which were removed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg starting in 2006 as a cost-saving measure as the city rebid bus contracts, ensured workers' seniority rights, salary and benefits when a bus contract was signed or revised.

Local 1181 President Michael Cordiello said Bloomberg's argument that cutting EPP saved the city more than \$200 million over five years was flawed, because it led to huge turnover among experienced drivers, salary cuts to veteran members, and a rise in delays for pickup times because of the learning curve for rookie drivers.

"There is no cost for the safety of our children," he said. "We don't transport cans of soda, or lumber. We don't transport shoes. We transport children."



Michael Cordiello, president of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181, center, chants with New York school bus drivers during a rally at City Hall on Wednesday. Photo Credit: Charles Eckert

Gov. Andrew Cuomo vetoed a bill in 2016 that would have restored EPP, citing a state Court of Appeals decision that said the city couldn't enforce the policy. Calls to include EPP in this year's state budget were ignored.

Richard Azzopardi, a spokesman for the governor's office, said that "any issue with this significant a fiscal impact should be debated as part of the budget process." He said the governor would "continue to discuss a resolution with all relevant stakeholders" but claimed that EPP restoration is "actually a city, not a state, funding issue."

Cordiello said his members are willing to strike if the state doesn't give them their protections, but didn't provide further details about when that work stoppage could occur. Several state and city elected officials said they back the union's call.

State Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte said she's introduced legislation to reinstate EPP.

"We can signal to our most vulnerable, our children, and our special needs children, that we are finally taking care of them," she said.

City Councilman Mark Treyger, who chairs the education committee, said the council is pushing Albany for the restoration.

"We must provide financial stability," he said.

