



CASBO

CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS

HB 5033 An Act Requiring the Installation and Use of Seat Safety Belts on School Buses

Commencing January 1, 2011, each school bus shall be equipped with lap/shoulder (3-point) seat safety belts.

The members of the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials are dedicated to the safety and well-being of students. The efficient and safe transport of children to and from school is paramount in our role as business managers of Connecticut's public schools. It is for this reason that we feel compelled to bring to your attention the following considerations regarding HB 5033 An Act Requiring the Installation and Use of Seat Safety Belts on School Buses:

Safety Studies: Both the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration and the US Department of Transportation have conducted research and concluded that requiring seat belts on large school buses will not increase the safety of students, due in part to the unique compartmentalization design.

Emergency evacuation: Should an issue arise that would require an emergency evacuation of a school bus such as a fire or submersion, seat belts would greatly increase the time required to evacuate. Young children may not be able to unbuckle themselves without assistance.

Ensuring use: Who would be responsible for ensuring the children are buckled up? If it is the driver, this may endanger children further. At each stop, the driver would be required to shut the engine off and leave the driver's seat, follow students boarding the bus to their seats and ensure their seatbelts are engaged properly. The flashing red lights do not work when the engine is off; therefore children crossing the street to board the bus would be in danger of passing cars. If it were not the driver, then a monitor for each bus would need to be hired. Either way, what would ensure that a child wouldn't unbuckle him/herself while in-route?

Longer routes: It has been estimated that checking seat belts at every stop will add several minutes per stop which will increase the length of bus ride or require additional buses.

3-Point seat belt: School districts use the same buses to transport kindergartners and high school seniors. The size difference of these students could range from 44 inches tall and 46 pounds to 6' 4" tall and 200+ pounds. The 3-point seat belt won't be adjustable for this great variance and improper fit of the belt can result in serious injuries from even a hard stop or what would have been a simple "fender-bender".

2-Point seat belt: If not worn low across the lap, serious internal injuries can result from an abrupt stop. The 2-point seat belt is not retractable and could pose an injury threat if swung around.

Reduced capacity: Seat belts would reduce capacity on the buses which would require more buses to be added or result in more children walking, which statistically, is more dangerous.

Funding: We wholeheartedly agree that you can't put a price on a life. The reality of this proposal is that it must be funded. There are many cost considerations from the installation and maintenance of seat belts, salary and benefits for monitors, and the increased costs of running additional buses and/or cost of increased routing.

As partners in school leadership, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further or offer additional information. Please contact CASBO's Executive Director, Sharon S. Bruce, CAE, at (860) 519-0023 or sbbruce@comcast.net.

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