



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

81 Wolcott Hill Road, Wethersfield, CT 06109-1242 - (860) 571-7446 - Fax (860) 571-7452 - Email admin@cabe.org

**Testimony
Submitted to the
Transportation Committee**

February 17, 2010

We are all saddened by the recent accident in which students on their way to a weekend science program were involved in an accident that took the life of one student. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends of the students.

As a result of the accident, discussion has begun again as to whether or not large school buses should have seat belts. The small school buses are already required to have lap belts.

The overall safety record of the student transportation industry in Connecticut is remarkable. In Connecticut alone, nearly 600,000 students safely travel to school and home from school each day.

Since Connecticut began keeping records in 1972, there has been one fatality involving a student on a school bus. In that time, there have been 24 fatalities involving pedestrians and passengers riding in other vehicles involved in a school bus accident. On average, the percentage of accidents in Connecticut that involve school buses is less than 1%.

The reason for the safe record is largely attributed to the manner in which school buses are designed. The school bus is the safest vehicle on the road, and the safest way for students to travel to school.

Research done by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the Transportation Research Board of the National Research Council (TRB), has concluded that school buses without lap belts offer excellent protection to occupants in crashes by virtue of their superior construction and the compartmentalized seating structure. This structure, which is unique to school buses, protects passengers by placing them between high-backed, well-padded seats that are designed to absorb crash forces. This system works so well that passengers in extremely severe accidents have escaped serious injury.

A 2002 school bus study by NHTSA resulted in a Congressional Report that detailed occupant safety in school buses¹. The report concluded that while lap belts helped to contain students in the event of a crash, an increased risk of neck injury was present with lap belts. The use of three-point lap belt and shoulder belts could offer a greater degree of safety, but if not worn properly could lead to an increased risk of injury.

The U.S. Department of Transportation in its final rule upgrading school bus passenger crash protection requirements found that, "After considering all available information, including the comments to the NPRM, we cannot conclude that a requirement for seat belts on large school buses will protect against an unreasonable risk

¹ Report to Congress, School Bus Safety: Crashworthiness Research, April 2002

of accidents or an unreasonable risk of death or injury in an accident.”² Beyond that, “NHTSA has been repeatedly asked to require seat belts on buses, has repeatedly reanalyzed the issue, and has repeatedly concluded that compartmentalization provides a high level of safety protection that obviates the safety need for a Federal requirement necessitating the installation of seat belts. Further, the agency has been acutely aware that a decision requiring seat belts on large buses cannot ignore the implications of such a requirement on pupil transportation costs. The Agency has been attentive to the fact that, as a result of requiring belts on large school buses, school bus purchasers would have to buy seat belt-equipped vehicles regardless of whether seat belts would be appropriate for their needs.”³

Connecticut’s children are safest traveling to school when riding in a school bus. Mandated installation of seat belts on Connecticut buses will provide no guarantee that they will be used, and would have a negligible impact on student safety. In light of the national research on this issue, CABE urges you to refrain from mandating the installation of seat belts on buses.

² U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Docket Number NHTSA-2008-0163 Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Seating System, Occupant Crash Protection, Seat Belt Anchorages, School Bus Passenger Seating and Crash Protection

³ *ibid*