



Testimony
Betsy Gara
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Transportation Committee
February 9, 2015

Although well-intentioned, the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *opposes* HB-5229, **AN ACT REQUIRING SEAT BELTS IN NEWLY PURCHASED SCHOOL BUSES.**

For Connecticut's small towns, state aid to municipalities has been largely flat funded, putting a considerable strain on local budgets and property taxpayers. At the same time, local and regional education budgets have had to absorb costs associated with sweeping new mandates, including implementation of common core standards, and new data assessment, teacher evaluation and professional development requirements.

According to information developed by the Connecticut School Transportation Association in 2010, outfitting a new school bus with seat belts could cost up to \$20,000 and retrofitting existing school buses with seat belts could cost \$35,000. Unfortunately, funding made available for school districts to retrofit school buses with seat belts was swept into the general fund to mitigate the budget deficit. As a result, this bill would impose a sizable unfunded mandate on our towns and cities.

Although the bill is limited to requiring seat belts in newly purchased school buses, it would be difficult for school districts to provide seat belts in new buses without providing them on all buses, if it is determined that seat belts would improve the safety of our children.

Given that there is no state funding available to reimburse municipalities for the cost of retrofitting school buses, COST opposes the bill and, instead, urges the committee to explore funding opportunities to assist school districts in utilizing buses with seat belts if it will improve the safety of students.