



TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

March 2, 2016

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 96% of Connecticut's population.

HB 5462, "An Act Requiring the Installation of Seat Belts on School Buses"

CCM opposes HB 5462.

The bill would require the installation of three-point seat belts on school buses purchased after 2021. Local officials have long held the safety of our children as a top priority. While CCM appreciates the intent of this proposal -- **HB 5462 would impose a new and unfunded state mandate on towns and cities without any measurable increase in child safety.** Given the current fiscal climate and uncertainty of funding to implement this proposal, CCM would ask the Committee to oppose any new mandates on towns and cities.

According to the non-partisan Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA), based on previous, similar proposals that would have, among other things, "required that school buses be equipped with lap/shoulder, or 3-point seat belts" – **the mandated costs imposed on municipalities could range between "\$48.5 million to \$106.6 million" over the course of the next decade.**¹

Background:

Costs Will Be High

- According to a 2007 Congressional Research Service Report, *Seat Belts on School Buses: Overview of the Issue*, it is estimated that a new school bus costs \$75,000 and the installation of the 3-point safety seat belts would be an additional \$8,000-\$15,000 per bus.

Other Concerns -- Aside from the cost of fitting newly purchased school buses with seat belts:

- Three-point harness belts would diminish capacity of the buses, requiring the purchase of additional buses, drivers and fuel to make up for the lost seating capacity.

¹ HB 5033, Fiscal Note No. 268; 2010.

- Three-point harness belts must be adjusted appropriately to the size of the user in order for the belts to not only provide protection but also not cause injury - who will be responsible for making sure each and every child is appropriately fitted?
- How will the use of the safety belts be enforced? Will school districts have to employ monitors for the school buses?
- There are also safety concerns with the potential for the belts to be used other than as designed (e.g. as weapons, for illegal restraint, or other such purposes).
- Who will help release young students from the belts in case of a need to evacuate the bus?

No Proof of Increased Safety

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the well-respected national organizations – The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, and the National Association of School Transportation – have both indicated that the installation of safety belts does not increase the safety and protection of the individuals riding on the bus. School buses are one of the safest forms of transportation in the United States, carrying more than 23.5 million children every day, while averaging six fatalities per year. School buses are already designed with significantly safety measures – roll bars throughout the roof system; compartmentalized seating with high backs and narrow aisles to contain riders to reduce impact of any side contact to name a few.

Summary:

According to OLR Report 2009-R-0419, currently there are only “six states – California, Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York and Texas – that require seat belts on school buses. However, the Louisiana and Texas laws do not take effect until those states obtain adequate funding.”

In the current fiscal climate, municipalities are struggling to maintain current services, and avoid increases to the local property tax. Additionally, recent deficit mitigation efforts have reduced funding available for school transportation. While well intentioned, this proposal will serve only to provide a false sense of security of increased safety at an enormous statewide expense.

CCM urges the Committee to take no action on HB 5462.

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If you have any questions, please contact Randy Collins, Advocacy Manager of CCM at rcollins@ccm-ct.org or (860) 707-6446.