

Testimony for the Planning & Development Committee March 20, 2016

Regarding: **HB 55462** An Act Requiring the Installation of Seat Safety Belts on School Buses

Representative Guerrero and members of the Transportation Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding HB 5462

My name is Robert P. Giesen and I am the Business Manager for Regional School District # 12 with over 30 years of experience in this field. I am also a past president of the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), a non-profit professional organization that represents school business officials (SBOs) that work in most of the 169 towns in Connecticut.

Student safety is paramount in all activities conducted by a school district, including the safe efficient transportation of all the students.

This bill does not improve safety for students riding large school buses as it proposes actions that would make buses less safe and would be a very costly unfunded mandate considering that the State of Connecticut has not been fully funding the transportation grant. As you are well aware even the current transportation grant has been reduced which will be a further erosion of the state not meeting its' statutory funding obligation.

It is for this reason that I feel compelled to bring to your attention the following considerations regarding HB 5462:

- Safety Studies conducted by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration and the US Department of Transportation have concluded that requiring seat belts on large school buses will not increase the safety of students, due in part to the unique compartmentalization design which over many decades of improvements remains the safest mode of student transportation.
- Emergency evacuation: Should an issue arise that would require an emergency evacuation of a school bus such as a fire or an accident; seat belts would greatly increase the time required to evacuate. Young children may not be able to unbuckle themselves without assistance.
- Who would be responsible for ensuring the children are buckled up? If it is the driver, this may endanger children further. Because of regulations, 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. When school busses are shut off the flashing red lights do not work. Therefore children crossing the street to board the bus would be in danger of passing cars.
- 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 which will not increase safety but only increase cost.
- 3-Point seat belt: School districts use the same buses to transport kindergartners and high school seniors. The passenger size difference could range from 44 inches tall and 46 pounds to 6' 4" tall and 200+ pounds. Any 3-point seat belt is not adjustable for this great variance and improper fit of the belt can result in serious injuries.
- 2-Point seat belt: This type of seat belt if not worn low across the lap, serious internal injuries can result from an abrupt stop.
- 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.

Finally this represents **ANOTHER UNFUNDED MANDATE** and this bill is that it would be very costly and not improve safety. There are many other considerations against this proposal but these are the obvious ones from an operations standpoint. As such I urge rejection of HB 5462. *Robert Giesen*