

# Testimony Offered to the General Assembly Transportation Committee

## Regarding

HB 5462 AN ACT REQUIRING THE INSTALLATION OF SEAT  
SAFETY BELTS ON SCHOOL BUSES

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My name is Stephen Tracy. From 1985 to 1993, I had the privilege of serving as the Superintendent of Schools for the town of New Milford. During that time, the Board of Education and I made the decision to install seat belts on all of the school buses serving the district. It turned out to be a big mistake.

The Board and I certainly identified with the sentiments of the parents who brought the seat belt proposal to us. We've all insisted that our children wear seat belts in our automobiles – why not on the school bus? So we appropriated the money and installed the lap belts.

Not long after the installation, the complaints began to pour in. Many students did not want to wear the belts, and bus drivers were distracted by the need to repeatedly remind students to keep the belts on. A few students decided that it would be fun to connect the belts across the aisle, creating safety hazards. Some parents demanded that their children not be required to wear the seat belts, believing that they might pose a risk in the event of certain kinds of crashes.

We also received information from bus safety experts noting some important distinctions between safety on a school bus and safety in an automobile. Due to its much greater mass, a school bus absorbs most of the energy from a collision with a smaller vehicle without moving very much itself. With high back cushioned seats, injuries for children who are thrown from their seats in a more serious accident are likely to be limited. And lap belts can

actually make things worse. Instead of a child's entire body moving forward and impacting the seat ahead, the child bends at the waist with her head and neck bearing most of the force of the blow as it impacts the seat ahead. Three-point belts would reduce this hazard. But their installation would reduce bus capacity and require the purchase of additional vehicles. Of course, we should have obtained this information before making our decision.

After several months of difficulty and complaints, we decided to remove the seat belts – at an additional expense.

While bus safety technology has no doubt improved over the intervening years, I urge you to consider New Milford's experience as you consider HB 5462.

  
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Stephen Tracy

3/1/16  
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Date