
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 185

AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL BUSES EQUIPPED WITH SEAT SAFETY BELTS.

SUMMARY

Starting July 1, 2025, this bill reestablishes and makes permanent, a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) school bus seat belt pilot program that previously sunset on December 31, 2017. The program helps pay for school buses with three-point lap and shoulder seat belts by refunding school bus companies (i.e., “carriers”) half the sales tax they pay for buses on which these seat belts were installed during manufacture. Program funding comes from the existing school bus seat belt account, which is a non-lapsing General Fund account funded by a portion (\$50) of each DMV fee collected for restoring suspended licenses and registrations (CGS § 14-50b).

The bill allows (1) school districts to apply to DMV, on a form the department provides, beginning July 1, 2025, and (2) bus companies to receive sales tax reimbursements for buses they purchase on or after this date, depending on the department’s approval of the application and funding from the account. Under the bill, the restarted program is generally unchanged, except for a new requirement that DMV, in collaboration with the Department of Education, annually inform school districts about the program and how to apply.

The bill also (1) requires the Transportation and Education committees to hold a public hearing on program participation and effectiveness during the 2030 legislative session (a public hearing was similarly required for the pilot program) and (2) eliminates an obsolete provision requiring these committees to recommend whether to continue the program.

Lastly, the bill makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2024

SCHOOL BUS SEAT BELT PROGRAM AND ACCOUNT

The school bus seat belt pilot program was active from July 1, 2011, to December 31, 2017. The bill reestablishes the program and makes it permanent.

Under the program, school districts' applications to DMV must include a proposed agreement between the district and the school bus company that transports the district's students. The agreement must (1) require that the carrier provide the school district with between one and 50 school buses, each equipped with three-point lap and shoulder seat belts, and (2) include a request by the carrier for funding (i.e., half the sales tax for purchasing these buses).

Participating school districts must (1) give the parents or legal guardians of each student who uses a school bus written notice about the availability and proper use of the seat belts and (2) teach students how to properly use the seat belts, including fastening and unfastening them. Participating school districts, the school bus companies with which they contract, and school bus operators are exempt from liability for injuries caused solely by a student's use, misuse, or failure to use a seat belt installed under the program.

The program is funded by the school bus seat belt account, which has remained funded since its creation in 2010, even after the pilot program sunset in 2017. The legislature has transferred school bus seat belt account funds to the General Fund in several budget and deficit mitigation bills between 2012 and 2017.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Transportation Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 31 Nay 5 (03/18/2024)