



Senate

General Assembly

File No. 202

February Session, 2024

Substitute Senate Bill No. 185

Senate, April 3, 2024

The Committee on Transportation reported through SEN. COHEN of the 12th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL BUSES EQUIPPED WITH SEAT SAFETY BELTS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 14-275d of the general statutes is repealed and the
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2024*):

3 (a) The Department of Motor Vehicles shall administer a program to
4 provide funding to offset a portion of sales tax on the purchase of school
5 buses equipped with [3-point lap/shoulder] three-point lap and
6 shoulder seat safety belts installed during the manufacture of such
7 buses. [From July 1, 2011, to December 31, 2017, inclusive] On and after
8 July 1, 2025, a local or regional school district may submit an application
9 to the department, on a form provided by said department, which shall
10 include a proposed agreement between such district and a private
11 carrier under contract with such district for the provision of
12 transportation of school children. Such agreement shall require such
13 carrier to provide the district with at least one but not more than fifty
14 school buses, each of which shall be equipped with such seat safety

15 belts, and shall include a request by such carrier for funds in an amount
16 equal to fifty per cent of the sales tax paid by the carrier for the purchase
17 of any such bus purchased on or after July 1, [2011] 2025. Such
18 agreement shall be contingent upon approval of the application and the
19 payment of such amount by the department. The department shall make
20 any such payments with funds available from the school bus seat belt
21 account established pursuant to subsection (a) of section 14-50b.

22 (b) A school district participating in the program shall provide
23 written notice concerning the availability and proper use of such seat
24 safety belts to a parent or legal guardian of each student who will be
25 transported on such school bus. A school district shall instruct such
26 students on the proper use, fastening and unfastening of such seat safety
27 belts.

28 (c) No local or regional school district, carrier with whom a local or
29 regional school district has contracted for the transportation of students,
30 or operator of a school bus shall be liable for damages for injury
31 resulting solely from a student's use, misuse or failure to use a seat
32 safety belt installed on a school bus used in the program established
33 under this section.

34 (d) The Department of Motor Vehicles, in collaboration with the
35 Department of Education, shall inform local and regional school
36 districts annually of the program established pursuant to subsection (a)
37 of this section and how to apply to such program.

38 [(d)] (e) During the [2018] 2030 regular session of the General
39 Assembly, the joint standing committees of the General Assembly
40 having cognizance of matters relating to transportation and education
41 shall conduct a joint public hearing on the level of participation in such
42 program and its effectiveness with respect to the use of such seat safety
43 belts. [Not later than March 1, 2018, the joint standing committees shall
44 make a recommendation to the General Assembly concerning the
45 continuation of such program.]

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:

Section 1	October 1, 2024	14-275d
-----------	-----------------	---------

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:

In Subsecs. (a) and (b), "safety" was added for accuracy and in Subsec. (e), "seat belts" was changed to "such seat safety belts" for accuracy.

TRA *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact: None

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 25 \$	FY 26 \$
Local and Regional School Districts	Savings	None	Minimal

Explanation

The bill results in a potential minimal savings annually beginning in FY 26 to local and regional school districts that contract with school bus companies which purchase buses with three-point lap and shoulder seat belts.

The bill reestablishes a grant program that refunds school bus companies for 50% of the sales tax on such school buses they purchase. The bill does not require school districts to purchase school buses with seat belts, which districts are allowed to do under current law.

To the extent that the bill reduces the cost to districts of contracting with private school bus companies, there would be a minimal savings. There were no grants awarded from FY 11 to FY 17, when the program was previously in effect

Grants awarded under the program are funded by the School Bus Seat Belt account, a non-lapsing General Fund account that was first established in FY 11. See Background for more information.

The bill requires the Department of Motor Vehicles, in collaboration with the Department of Education, to inform schools districts annually

about the program. This has no fiscal impact as it can be done within current operations.

Background

PA 10-83, the act which established the school bus seat belt pilot program, also established the School Bus Seat Belt account as a separate non-lapsing General Fund account. Funding for this account is provided by a portion of the fee for restoring a suspended or revoked license (\$50 of the \$175 fee). Though the pilot program previously sunset on December 31, 2017, the School Bus Seat Belt account and its funding source remain active.

From its inception in FY 11 through FY 23, the account realized cumulative revenue of \$23.7 million, transfers-out of \$18.5 million¹, and no spending related to the school bus seat belt pilot program. As of the beginning of FY 24, the account had a balance of \$5.3 million and is projected to realize approximately \$1.2 million in revenue annually from license restoration fees.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to the number of grants awarded from the School Bus Seat Belt account.

¹ The most recent transfer-out was in FY 19 as part of the FY 18 and FY 19 biennial budget.

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)