



## **MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**

850 Hungerford Drive ♦ Room 123 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850



Bill: House Bill 1473  
Title: School Vehicles - Three-Point Seat Belts  
Committee: Environment and Transportation  
Date: March 3, 2016  
Position: **OPPOSE**  
Contact: Michael Durso, President, Montgomery County Board of Education

The Montgomery County Board of Education opposes House Bill 1473.

Currently, with only a handful of states requiring seat belts on school buses, there is an average of six fatalities per year inside of a school bus. This is with 25 million students riding a school bus each school day. While every life is precious and worth saving, the question is, "Can a number as small as six fatalities per year be reduced by the use of seat belts?" The fatalities tend to be caused by significant crashes with large trucks, trains, and large fixed objects that protrude into the passenger compartment of the school bus where injuries and fatalities are likely with or without seat belts. School buses, without seat belts, are currently the safest form of ground transportation, rivaling the safety record of air travel. In fact, we are concerned that seat belts themselves present a safety hazard. In the event of a bus engine fire, for example, younger children may take longer to evacuate, which is a serious concern.

The bill states that when a teacher is on a school bus, they are in charge of the students, but the bill states that the person operating a bus with standees or someone not wearing a seat belt is subject to a fine. The requirement that no bus be operated unless all occupants under 16 are wearing a seat belt causes the potential need for an additional adult on the bus to monitor seat belt use or the use of costly electronic devices like those in many automobiles that detect whether each seating position is occupied and then alerts the bus operator when there is an occupant whose seat belt is not buckled.

The addition of three-point seat belts on buses will increase the cost of the annual bus replacement purchase by approximately \$800,000 starting in Fiscal Year 2019, so between FY 2018–FY 2012, the total for new buses will be \$2.8 million. In addition, we will need to retrofit remaining buses at a cost of \$1.9 million.

If attendants are needed on all buses to enforce seat belt usage, adding them to the 639 routes that currently operate without bus attendants would cost approximately \$25 million annually. The cost of adding an electronic system to the bus that detects occupied seating positions and alerts the driver when an occupant is unbuckled is unknown as this technology is not currently available on school buses.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board of Education, thank you for your consideration and we urge an unfavorable report.