

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 399 (Delegate Frank, *et al.*)
Commerce and Government Matters

Vehicle Laws - Taxicabs - Availability of Seat Belts for Passengers

This bill requires that taxicabs be equipped with two sets of seat belts in both the front and rear seats and that the seat belts be accessible and in good working condition. It also requires that each taxicab in the State must be inspected to verify that it is equipped with seat belts as required by the bill by July 1, 1997.

The bill clarifies that passengers are not required to wear a seat belt, and provides that establishing the failure of a passenger to use a seat belt may not be considered evidence of negligence or contributory negligence, limit certain liability, or diminish recovery for damages arising out of the ownership, maintenance, or operations of a taxicab. Except under specified circumstances, the bill prohibits a party, witness, or counsel from making reference to a seat belt during certain trials. The bill also requires a court to order separate trials for joint tort-feasors or defendants in a civil action under specified circumstances.

This bill has an effective date June 1, 1997.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The Public Service Commission could handle the additional inspection requirements with existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: The bill's changes could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal impact on taxicab providers.

Fiscal Analysis

State Effect: The Public Service Commission (PSC) regulates and inspects approximately 1,500 taxicabs in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Cumberland, and Hagerstown. The PSC believes that these taxicabs are equipped with seat belts in good, working order. The additional inspection requirement of the bill could be handled with existing budgeted PSC resources as the PSC already requires that taxicabs be inspected at least twice a year. There is no fee associated with the inspections provided by the PSC.

Local Effect: Certain counties such as Prince George's and Anne Arundel license taxicab providers in their respective jurisdictions. Both counties report that the bill's additional inspection requirement could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

Small Business Effect: There are approximately 80 taxicab companies in the State. Virtually all are small businesses. Many additional licensed taxicab drivers are single person operators who contract with a larger company. Generally, the individual operator bears the costs associated with the maintenance and inspection of the vehicle. Thus, these individual operators and the 80 taxicab companies could be minimally impacted by this bill to the extent that they are required to repair or install new seat belts. The PSC advises that the costs associated with installing a new set is approximately \$25.

Information Source(s): Anne Arundel, Dorchester, Garrett, and Prince George's counties; Judiciary (District Court of Maryland); Motor Vehicle Administration; Public Service Commission

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