

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1605 (Delegate Miele, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Task Force on Maryland Student Transportation Safety

This bill establishes a Task Force on Maryland Student Transportation Safety. The task force must study and make recommendations regarding the safe transportation of students on school buses in the State. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide staff for the task force. By January 1, 2019, the task force must report its findings to the Governor, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, and the House Environment and Transportation Committee. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2018, and terminates after June 30, 2019.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can staff the task force and provide expense reimbursements with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The study conducted by the task force must include examination of:

- the safest manner for transporting students on a school bus;
- the feasibility of requiring seat belts on school buses;
- the costs and benefits associated with the installation and use of seat belts on school buses;

- liability and enforcement issues associated with seat belt use on school buses; and
- any other issue the task force considers necessary.

Current Law: Federal and State law includes numerous safety requirements for school vehicles. Seat belts for students are not required for a Type I school vehicle (school bus) in Maryland. A local school system is authorized to purchase school buses with seat belts. Every motor vehicle used by nursery schools, camps, day nurseries, or day care centers for children with intellectual disabilities that is used to transport children must be equipped with seat belts for each seat and be subject to other regulations prescribed by the Motor Vehicle Administration, unless the vehicle is a Type I school vehicle or was formerly registered as a Type I school vehicle.

Background: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has produced a report focused on transportation crashes nationwide from 2004 to 2013. The report indicates that 0.4% of fatal motor vehicle traffic crashes during the time period were classified as school-transportation related. Of the 1,344 people who died as a result of school-transportation-related crashes (averaging about 134 per year), 8% were occupants of school vehicles, 71% were occupants of other vehicles involved in the crash, and 21% were nonoccupants (pedestrians, bicyclist, etc.).

Of the 327 individuals aged 0 to 18 who died nationwide due to these crashes from 2004 to 2013, 54 were occupants of school vehicles, 147 were occupants of other vehicles, and 126 were pedestrians or otherwise nonoccupants. The Department of Legislative Services is aware of one school-transportation-related fatality of a student in Maryland during this period; the incident apparently did not involve a vehicular crash. NHTSA has also reported that students are far more likely to arrive alive at school when taking the school bus instead of a passenger car.

In May 2015, the 16th National Congress on School Transportation reiterated earlier recommendations that lap seat belts not be installed on passenger seats in large school buses (*i.e.*, those over 10,000 pounds) except in conjunction with child safety restraint systems that comply with federal requirements for those systems.

There are approximately 8,300 public school buses in the State as well as nearly 900 private school buses. MSDE advises that lap seat belts would increase the purchase price of a new school bus by about \$1,800 and that lap and shoulder (three-point) seat belts would increase the price by \$7,500. To retrofit existing buses the cost is about \$11,500 for lap seat belts and about \$21,000 for three-point seat belts.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Frederick County; Maryland State Department of Education;
Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 12, 2018
nb/rhh

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