



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts - HB134
Testimony of Maryland State Delegate Deni Taveras

Thank you, Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and esteemed committee members. As always, it is an honor to be before you once again. I am here to ask for your favorable report on HB134 - Seat Belts on School Buses.

I would like to express my gratitude to this committee for supporting this bill last year. The minor change to HB134 allowed this bill to take effect after 2029, while all other aspects remain the same as the version that successfully passed the House last year.

School buses are the primary mode of transportation for thousands of Maryland students each day, making their safety a top priority. Our focus must remain on protecting the children who rely on these buses daily. Seat belts have long been a standard in personal vehicles, yet school buses—where children are just as vulnerable in a crash—have been exempt from this basic safety feature. A recent accident in Howard County, where a school bus carrying 19 students from Hammond Middle School overturned, resulted in several students being hospitalized, underscores the potential safety risks associated with school bus travel.

The importance of this bill is highlighted by nine states requiring seat belts - New York, New Jersey, Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Nevada, California, and Iowa. Furthermore, between 2011 and 2020, there were 1,009 fatal school-transportation-related crashes resulting in 1,125 fatalities, averaging 113 fatalities per year.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has found that seatbelts can significantly enhance school bus safety and improve student behavior, as evidenced by reduced disciplinary issues in buses with seat belts. However, current safety measures like 'compartmentalization' fall short during side-impacts or rollovers, highlighted by fatal accidents, including the two recent school bus rollovers in Maryland. This bill advocates for the proactive addition of seat belts to school buses to enhance safety, responding to community concerns and aiming to prevent future tragedies.

In closing, as such I ask this esteemed committee for your favorable report on HB134.