



**Board of Education
of Howard County**

Jolene Mosley, *Chair*

Linfeng Chen, Ph.D., *Vice Chair*

Andrea Chamblee, Esq.

Jennifer Swickard Mallo

Jacky McCoy

Meg Ricks

Antonia Watts

James Obasiolu
Student Member

William J. Barnes
*Superintendent,
Secretary/Treasurer*

**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Environment and Transportation Committee
February 14, 2025**

**HB0134: UNFAVORABLE
Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts** as an unfunded mandate that has the potential to add extensive costs to future school system bus purchases.

HB0134 initially requires schools to include instruction on school bus safety and the proper use of seat belts on school buses within a program of safety education. HB0134 then requires all buses purchased after July 1, 2027, to be equipped with seat belts for every seat on a bus.

Seat belts are currently used on buses for special education transportation in Howard County. Moreover, school bus safety education is addressed both through the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) curriculum and the HCPSS Transportation Office. Specifically, a kindergarten health education curricular objective includes instruction that takes place during the Safety and Violence Prevention unit and includes identifying ways to stay safe when riding in a vehicle or bus. School bus drivers in Howard County also discuss bus safety with riders in conjunction with two bus evacuation drills conducted systemwide annually by the Transportation Office. While the use of seat belts on regular school buses has been debated under prior introductions of similar bills, and the Board supports the potential to improve safety for all students, there are concerns with the costs that would result from HB0134.

HB0134 has improved over the original 2024 version of the bill which also required retrofitting of existing buses. However, as noted in the [fiscal and policy note](#) from the previous introduction “new school buses that have seat belts installed for every passenger are approximately \$10,000 more expensive than those without them.” For Howard County, this would be factored into future transportation services bids with costs spread over the term of the contract. Not only would the costs of seat belts add to the base price of the purchase of a bus, but more buses will be required. It is the Board’s understanding that seats that can be used to sit three across a bench seat would be reduced to a maximum of two occupants with the prescribed seatbelt system. As such, in cases where the school system optimizes ridership for smaller occupants, this would reduce the maximum number of students per bus, requiring additional buses to be used to transport students. The average annual cost of a bus route contract stands at around \$100,000 - \$125,000 (not including routes for students receiving special education service). As a legislative platform, the Board opposes unfunded mandates.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on HB0134 from this Committee.