



Re: SB 498 School Buses - Seat Belts

Senator Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The Maryland Association of Pupil Transportation (MAPT) is an organization that is composed of pupil transportation leaders from each Local Education Agency (LEA). MAPT is where you will find the most knowledgeable professionals involved in transporting Maryland public school students.

The question on if school buses should have seat belts for students has been a topic of debate for many years. With time, the school bus industry is evolving on this issue. On a federal level, both the National Transportation Safety Board and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have moved to the position that lap/shoulder belts further enhance protection of students. Both agencies support all new school buses having lap/shoulder belts. The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services issued a position paper in May 2020 supporting all new school buses having lap/shoulder belts. Bus manufacturers are now able to provide lap/shoulder belts without reducing bus capacity. As of November 2024, BlueBird, one of the three traditional large bus manufacturers, makes lap/shoulder belts standard equipment on all of their school buses and this is without increasing the cost of the bus. In Maryland, all EV buses are required to have lap/shoulder belts. Currently, many Maryland school systems have lap/shoulder belts on special needs route buses and several school systems are now moving to lap/shoulder belts on all replacement regular route school buses.

SB 498, with the amendment, mitigates many of the concerns from the student transportation industry about seat belts on school buses. It requires lap/shoulder belts only on new school buses, it protects school bus drivers, and it does not impose impossible expectations. With a uniform requirement, we believe the incremental cost for lap/shoulder belts should be reduced.

MAPT supports a favorable report, with the amendments, for SB 498.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions on the topic of seat belts on school buses or any school bus related item. You can reach me at (301) 475 4256 ext 34132 or by email at jkthompson@smcps.org.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Thompson

ALLEGANY – ANNE ARUNDEL – BALTIMORE CITY – BALTIMORE COUNTY – CALVERT – CAROLINE – CARROLL – CECIL – CHARLES – DORCHESTER – FREDERICK – GARRETT – HARFORD – HOWARD – KENT – MONTGOMERY – PRINCE GEORGE'S – QUEEN ANNE'S – ST. MARY'S – SOMERSET – TALBOT – WASHINGTON – WICOMICO – WORCESTER