



2026 WRITTEN TESTIMONY HB 110

Motor Vehicles – School Buses – Seat Belts FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

House Bill 110 generally requires existing public school safety education programs to include student instruction concerning school bus safety and the proper use of seat belts on school buses, and requires school buses purchased after July 1, 2030, and registered in Maryland to be equipped with seat belts.

In addition, however, HB 110 creates a new immunity (at page 5 line 32 to page 6 line 2) from criminal and civil liability based on the “failure of a school bus operator to ensure that an occupant of a school bus was wearing a seat belt.”

School buses in Maryland transport the most precious cargo imaginable – our children – on the roads and highways of our State. Data shows that severe wrecks, and severe injuries, have become more commonplace since the pandemic. Seat belts will improve safety on school buses in Maryland and help to minimize or prevent injuries to children in the unfortunate event of a wreck involving a bus full of kids. In addition, certain wheelchair-using schoolchildren transported by school bus must be belted for their own safety and for the safety of other passengers.

Because seat belts save lives, and because the lives at stake in this context are the lives of children, it would be counterproductive to require seat belts in school buses while also granting criminal and civil liability to school bus operators who fail (or deliberately refuse) to require the use of those same seat belts. For these reasons, a blanket grant of criminal and civil immunity undermines the laudable public safety goals of HB 110.

About Maryland Association for Justice

The Maryland Association for Justice (MAJ) represents over 1,250 trial attorneys throughout the state of Maryland. MAJ advocates for the preservation of the civil justice system, the protection of the rights of consumers and the education and professional development of its members.

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The Maryland Association for Justice suggests that the immunity provision in HB 110 should be limited to cases in which a failure to ensure seat belt use is the **SOLE** basis for a criminal prosecution or a civil action for damages. In other words, a failure to ensure seat belt use *alone* – e.g., in the absence of evidence of criminal intent, policy or protocol violations, or some other unreasonably unsafe conduct – may not be the sole basis for criminal prosecution or a civil action for damages. If that is the intent of HB 110, stating that intent more explicitly will provide clarity for school bus operators, boards of education, courts, and Maryland families.

For all of these reasons, the Maryland Association for Justice respectfully requests a report of FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS, as follows:

On page 5, line 33, after “MAY NOT BE THE” insert “**SOLE.**”

The Maryland Association for Justice urges a Report of FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS on HB 110.