

HB110 - Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts

Uploaded by: Joseph Jakuta

Position: FAV

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB110 - "Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 5, 2025



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to HB134, "Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts." Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change-causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first-in-the-nation School Climate Change Action Plan.

In our work developing a Climate Change Action Plan for PGCPS, we found that having safety belts was an important step to encourage some parents who have access to bus service to allow their kids to ride the bus instead of driving children to school. The report states specifically:

Reliable, on-time and safe bus transportation performance is the single most important tool to increase ridership. The survey conducted by the CCAP Focus Work Group provided some insights into the thoughts of students in particular into the state of the buses. Some of these suggestions appear to come in at a reasonable cost and can be easily implemented and other suggestions are already being implemented by PGCPS.

Additionally, information is crucial to both parents and students in order to encourage increased bus riding. Students and parents/caregivers need to be aware of the safety features and amenities as they become available through active communication. Parents/caregivers need to be able to have accurate information as to when pick-ups and drop-offs will occur.

In order to keep bus ridership high so as to avoid parents taking single vehicle trips to schools, PGCPS must make sure the school population at large has access to safe buses with a positive experience and the knowledge that this is the best option.¹

This past year among the crashes that were noteworthy enough to make the news:

- Seven students were hospitalized with minor injuries following a crash in Oct. 2025 in Baltimore County
- There was a multi-vehicle crash involving a school bus near C. Milton Wright High School that killed 16-year-old Blake Elliott and seriously injured a 17-year-old classmate in Harford County
- 10 children and 2 adults were injured in a school bus crash in Silver Spring May 2025

According to the Baltimore Sun there were 500 crashes involving school buses in Maryland last year.² I also know firsthand that my children's bus was also involved in a minor crash in 2024. Unfortunately, some crashes do turn tragic, and safety belts will definitely help reduce injuries in the worst crashes and also provide parents with more certainty as to their children's safety on school buses.

We encourage a **FAVORABLE** report for this important legislation.

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eS5YuvflbLyDsnw5QWwqITtKBeEjx28/view>

² <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/11/07/school-bus-crashes/>

HB 110 Motor Vehicles - Buses - Seat Belts Letter

Uploaded by: Kimberly Buckheit

Position: FAV

MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

Bill:	House Bill 110	Date:	February 3, 2026
Title:	Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts	Committee:	Environment and Transportation
Position:	Favorable	Contact:	Kimberly Buckheit kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov 443-902-0622

On behalf of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of support for House Bill 110.

MCSS works to advance policies and practices that strengthen student safety across all learning environments, including during transportation to and from school. House Bill 110 reflects a thoughtful, forward-looking approach to student transportation safety by combining safety education, modernized equipment standards, and legal clarity to ensure effective implementation.

Beginning July 1, 2030, the bill requires all newly registered school buses in Maryland to be equipped with three-point seat belts. To ensure these upgrades are effective, the bill also mandates student instruction on proper seat belt use. Importantly, HB 110 includes a no-liability provision for operators, schools, and municipalities—addressing a key operational concern and protecting drivers during implementation.

While Maryland's school buses are generally safe, side-impact and rollover crashes remain a risk. Kristin Poland of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has noted that unrestrained students are often thrown from their seats during such incidents, whereas properly worn three-point belts keep occupants within the protective seating compartment.

House Bill 110 implements a comprehensive approach by pairing equipment upgrades with required seat belt education, ensuring that safety hardware is supported by the instruction needed for consistent, effective use. By applying the seat belt requirement to newly purchased buses after July 1, 2030, the bill takes a practical, phased approach that allows school systems to integrate this enhancement into existing fleet replacement cycles while advancing a clear safety standard.

By adopting House Bill 110, Maryland aligns with evolving national safety standards and best practices identified by transportation stakeholders and safety experts. Several states already require seat belts on new school buses, with districts reporting that these restraints provide both enhanced crash protection and a noticeable reduction in student misbehavior. This data-informed legislation represents a proactive, layered approach to student safety, ensuring Maryland's fleet meets the benchmarks established by national transportation experts while fostering a more controlled environment for drivers.

Thank you again for taking the time to consider the information shared above, and MCSS respectfully requests that the committee give House Bill 110 a favorable report.



2026-02-02- MD- School Bus Safety - HB 110 Occupan

Uploaded by: Kristin Poland

Position: FAV



Testimony of

National Transportation Safety Board

Before the

House Environment and Transportation Committee
The Maryland General Assembly

– On –

House Bill 110, Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts

–

Annapolis, MD • February 5, 2026

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the committee, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill (HB) 110—legislation that would require occupant restraining devices to be installed in most school buses purchased after July 1, 2030.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in the other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

School bus travel is one of the safest forms of transportation in the United States. School buses are designed with a passive form of occupant protection, termed “compartmentalization,” which only requires the passenger to sit properly in the seat facing forward and functions by forming a compartment around the bus occupant. Compartmentalization is designed to contain passengers within their seating compartments during front and rear impact collisions. A key aspect of this occupant protection system is that passengers remain within the compartment prior to and during an impact so they benefit from the energy-absorbing seat design.

Unfortunately, however, we continue to see occupant protection safety issues in school bus transportation, particularly in crashes that include:

- side-impact collisions,
- rollovers in which compartmentalization is incomplete and fails to provide sufficient protection for occupants, and
- precrash bus maneuvers that move occupants out of the protective seating compartment before the crash occurs.

For example, on October 27, 2020, a freightliner truck collided with a school bus in Decatur, Tennessee, killing the bus driver and a 7-year-old passenger and injuring multiple passengers. We found that several of the school bus passengers were not seated properly, which increased their risk of injury. Lap/shoulder belts would have further mitigated the forward inertial movement of the unbelted passengers on the school bus, keeping them within the protecting seating compartment and reducing their risk of injury, especially those passengers near the impact area.

On November 21, 2016, 6 students died and more than 20 others were injured in Chattanooga, Tennessee, when a school bus struck a utility pole, rolled onto its right side, and collided with a tree. The bus was carrying 37 students from school to their drop-off locations. At the time of the crash, the bus was traveling 52 mph in a 25-mph zone, and the bus driver was on a cell phone call. The school bus passengers were at risk from the precrash vehicle motions, which threw them from their seating compartments prior to the bus striking the utility pole. This rendered compartmentalization ineffective during the rollover sequence. Therefore, we recommended that each state, including Maryland, require that lap/shoulder belts be installed in all new large school buses to best protect all occupants.

In February 2012, a school bus transporting students to Chesterfield Elementary School in Chesterfield, New Jersey, was struck at an intersection by a roll-off truck, resulting in 1 bus passenger fatality, 5 serious injuries, and 11 minor injuries. The fatally and severely injured passengers were seated in the back half of the school bus, in the area of higher impact forces and accelerations. Some students on the school bus wore their lap belts improperly or not at all. Our investigation concluded that, in severe side-impact crashes like the Chesterfield crash, properly worn lap/shoulder belts reduce injuries related to the upper body flailing that is commonly seen with lap-only belts and, therefore, provide the best protection for school bus passengers. Further, better student, parent, and school district education and training may increase the use and proper fit of passenger seat belts in school buses. Thus, we recommended that school districts provide improved information to parents and students regarding the importance of properly using seat belts on school buses.

We found that passenger lap/shoulder belts mitigated injuries after a side-impact collision and rollover involving a school bus and a pickup truck in Helena, Montana, in November 2012. The four lap/shoulder belted bus occupants were treated for minor injuries; the belts helped keep the occupants within their seating compartments and limited potentially injurious occupant-to-occupant contact. None of the bus occupants sustained concussions or other injuries that impeded their ability to evacuate, which is uncommon in rollover crashes and indicates that the lap/shoulder belts provided effective protection.

Finally, our investigation of a 2014 single vehicle school bus crash in Anaheim, California, demonstrated that the proper use of lap/shoulder belts on a school bus reduced passenger injuries. When the bus driver lost consciousness as a result of a medical condition, the school bus departed the roadway, eventually striking and dislodging a concrete light post and uprooting a tree. The bus came to rest at an angle on an embankment, leaning onto a large tree that had scraped the bus from its left front axle back to its rear axle. The tree intruded extensively into the school bus, especially near the left side emergency exit door. Importantly, two students seated in

the area of maximum intrusion were wearing their seatbelts at the time of the crash, which reduced the severity of these passengers' injuries.

School bus passenger seat belts reduce injuries and fatalities and prevent ejections in school bus crashes and rollovers, but only if the seat belts are properly worn. We recently investigated an August 13, 2025, school bus rollover crash in Leander, Texas. Investigators reviewed onboard video footage to determine seat belt use. Of the 42 passengers visible, only 6 were belted, and 4 of those were wearing only the lap portion of the lap/shoulder belt. We found that most passengers did not use the available lap/shoulder belts or five-point harnesses, resulting in occupant-to-interior and occupant-to-occupant impacts that caused injuries.

Although compartmentalization makes school buses extremely safe, passengers without properly worn lap/shoulder belts remain vulnerable to either ejection or injury within the school bus (for example, from being thrown into an intrusion area). Therefore, to protect passengers in large school buses, we recommend that Maryland amend its statute to require passenger lap/shoulder belts for all passenger seating positions in new large school buses in accordance with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 222.

HB 110 School Buses - Seat Belts (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Pat Fannon

Position: FAV



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
1217 S. Potomac Street
Baltimore, MD 21224
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

BILL: HB 110

TITLE: Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts

DATE: February 5, 2026

POSITION: Favorable

COMMITTEE: House Environment and Transportation Committee &
House Ways and Means Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents, **supports** HB 110.

This bill requires every school bus purchased on or after July 1, 2030, and registered in the State to be equipped with, for each seat on the school bus, three-point seat belts that are accessible to passengers. Local school systems must provide student instruction on school bus safety and the proper use of seat belts on school buses, as part of an existing program of safety education. The failure of a school bus operator to ensure that an occupant of a school bus was wearing a seat belt may not be the basis of a criminal prosecution or a civil action for damages against the school bus operator or a school, school district, or municipality. As under current law, "seat belt" is defined as any belt, strap, harness, or like device. The bill also makes various technical changes to terminology.

PSSAM appreciates the intent of House Bill 110 and the sponsors' concern for the safety and well-being of students on school buses. The safe transportation of our students is a top priority for all local superintendents.

While we still believe that school buses are almost 40 times safer than any other form of ground transportation in preventing serious injury or death**, we understand that the installation of seat belts on buses is a matter of when, not if, and, we appreciate the

sponsor's willingness to work with school systems to mitigate the financial and operational impact of changing our bus fleet.

We particularly want to thank the sponsor for taking our concerns seriously regarding student behavior on school buses and potential liability concerns. Although we implement numerous strategies and procedures to lessen the chance of inappropriate action on the part of students, this can be a difficult task.

Therefore, PSSAM **supports** House Bill 110.

**School bus safety requirements are rigid and go well beyond those required for all other passenger vehicles. School buses are constructed with high back padded seats, compartmentalized seating, reinforced chassis, and front and rear bumpers. Compartmentalization provides a protective envelope consisting of strong, closely-spaced seats that have energy-absorbing seat backs. Local school systems adhere strictly to these guidelines. School buses have done an exceptional job of protecting students from serious injury or death in severe head-on and rear-end collisions.

2026 HB 110 -- School Bus Seat Belt Immunity.pdf

Uploaded by: George Tolley

Position: FWA



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.

10440 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 250
Columbia, MD 21044

(410) 872-0990 | FAX (410) 872-0993
info@mdforjustice.com

mdforjustice.com

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.

HB 110 - Seat Belts .pdf

Uploaded by: Marty Lostrom

Position: FWA



February 3, 2026

The Honorable Marc Korman and Members
House Environment & Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Jheanelle K Wilkins and Members
House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS HB 110 – Motor Vehicles – School Buses – Seat Belts

Dear Chair Korman and Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Guyton and Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of both Committees:

The Maryland School Bus Contractors Association (MSBCA) supports with amendments HB 110 – Motor Vehicles – School Buses – Seat Belts. MSBCA serves as the voice of the private school bus companies that contract with local Maryland school systems in 20 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions. MSBCA members own and operate over 3,600, or 50%, of the school buses transporting school children across the great State of Maryland. MSBCA contracted school buses routes travel over 58 million miles each year while remaining fully committed to the safety of the students we transport and considers it a privilege to do so.

MSBCA supports amendments submitted by Delegate Taveras (613229/1) related to HB 110. However, if additional amendments are introduced, MSBCA leadership will review and reserve the right to amend or change our position.

First and foremost, MSBCA remains committed to the safety of the students they transport and considers it a privilege to do so. The Association also remains committed to the position that the **yellow school bus is by far the safest mode of transporting children to and from school, with or without seat belts.** School buses have been demonstrated as the safest mode of transportation for many years, thanks to the manufacturers' dedication to passenger safety and responsible school bus contractors and their drivers.

Again, MSBCA looks forward to working with all our legislators to make Maryland the safest and most efficient state in the country for all our children.

Sincerely,

Steve Nelson

Steve Nelson
President

Marty Lostrom

Martha "Marty" Lostrom
Executive Director

HB110 OPPOSE.pdf

Uploaded by: Grace Wilson

Position: UNF



HB0110 – MOTOR VEHICLES – SCHOOL BUSES – SEAT BELTS

February 5, 2026

ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION

OPPOSE

Grace Wilson, Director of Legislation & Policy (410.440.1758)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB0110 - Motor Vehicles - School Buses**. This bill requires the public school safety education program to include student instruction concerning school bus safety and the proper use of seat belts on school buses. Additionally, the bill requires that every school bus purchased on or after July 1, 2030, and registered in the State be equipped with a three-point seat belt for each seat that are accessible to passengers. Furthermore, the failure of a school bus operator to ensure that an occupant of a school bus wearing a seatbelt may not be the basis of a criminal prosecution or a civil action for damages against the school bus operator or a school, school district, or municipality.

AACPS opposes legislation proposing new unfunded safety mandates including seatbelts on school buses. Local boards of education are responsible for providing funding for the transportation of students within their school system. Over the years, local school systems' responsibilities for transporting students have significantly increased due to additional costs associated with transporting special education, nonpublic placement, and homeless students. Operational expenses associated with fuel costs and labor shortages have also contributed to increased expenditures. Although the State provides some funding for transportation, the funding does not increase sufficiently from year to year to cover increasing enrollments as well as the increasing costs of obtaining and maintaining school buses.

This bill imposes a significant unfunded safety mandate on local school systems. Buses purchased by AACPS and our contractors are required to be equipped with lap and shoulder straps in the first five rows to accommodate the anticipated increased enrollment of three- and four-year-old students. Buses fully equipped with seat belts cost an additional \$16,000 per bus. AACPS anticipates that this mandate will result in an additional \$36,000 increased annual costs for AACPS to purchase school buses and an additional \$288,000 in annual contractual cost, as local school systems will likely bear the increase costs of purchasing school buses for school bus contractors. Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB0110.

HB 110 - Oppose - Motor Vehicles - School Buses -

Uploaded by: Sam Mathias

Position: UNF

BILL: House Bill 110
TITLE: Motor Vehicles- School Buses – Seat Belts
HEARING DATE: February 5, 2026
POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
COMMITTEE: Environment & Transportation
CONTACT: Sam Mathias, Legal & Policy Director (smathias@mabe.org)

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State’s local boards of education, **respectfully opposes House Bill 110, Motor Vehicles – School Buses – Seat Belts**. MABE greatly appreciates the underlying principle of this legislation in support of the safe transport of students on school buses. But the magnitude of the unfunded mandates contemplated by this legislation outweighs the modest and unproven benefits to student safety that it would accomplish.

HB 110 establishes a program regarding school bus safety education and the proper use of seat belts on school buses and requires all school buses purchased on or after July 1, 2030, to be equipped with three-point seat belts.

Existing federal and engineering standards already make school buses among the safest forms of student transportation. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, large school buses are heavier and distribute the force of a crash differently than other vehicles, contributing to safer travel for students. Compartmentalization (the close spacing of seating) further protects students during everyday travel. By contrast, school buses weighing 10,000 pounds or less are required by federal law to be equipped with seat belts as they are lighter vehicles that lack the inherently safer construction of heavier buses.

Despite these existing safety protections, HB 110 would impose a significant fiscal burden and constraints on local decision-making due to a statewide mandate. In a fiscal note for the prior iteration of this bill in 2025, the Maryland State Department of Education estimates school districts spending an additional \$10,000 per school bus to be equipped with seat belts.

Beyond cost, the bill raises practical implementation concerns for daily school operations. The use of seat belts on school buses raises logistical challenges, particularly concerning younger students who may require assistance with buckling and unbuckling their seat belts. This could potentially create delays in getting on and off buses, leading to disruptions in the daily transportation schedules and increased operational complexity for school systems.

MABE's opposition to House Bill 110 is grounded in a strong commitment to student safety and the belief that current school bus design and safety requirements already achieve a very high standard of protection against serious injuries to students being transported to and from school.

For these reasons, MABE opposes HB 110 and **respectfully requests an unfavorable report.**