



## MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

850 Hungerford Drive ♦ Room 123 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850



Bill: Senate Bill 183  
Title: School Vehicles - Seat Belts – Requirements  
Committee: Judicial Proceedings  
Date: February 2, 2016  
Position: **OPPOSE**  
Contact: Michael Durso, President, Montgomery County Board of Education

The Montgomery County Board of Education opposes Senate Bill 183.

The Board appreciates the intent of Senate Bill 183 and the sponsors' concern for the safety and well-being of our students on school buses. The safe transportation of our students is always a top priority. However, we respectfully oppose Senate Bill 183 for the following reasons. This bill requires that all buses be equipped with seat belts by 2022. The life of a bus in Maryland is 12 years in most counties (and 15 years in some). Requiring all buses to be equipped with seat belts only six years from now means that approximately one half of current school buses will have to be retrofitted with seat belts (a more expensive process) and invests money in older buses, even some that will be retired one or two years later. The alternative to retrofitting is to accelerate the replacement of all current school buses over the next six years, a very cost-prohibitive plan. For Montgomery County, the fiscal impact to outfit school buses with seat belts will be \$2.7 million.

There is much debate about whether seat belts will do any good, and given the very small potential for safety improvements, whether they are worth the significant expense or whether there are better, more impactful, lifesaving and injury reducing ways to spend such funds. This bill does not specify what type of seat belts are required and would allow for school buses to meet the law by being equipped with lap only seat belts. While there is tremendous debate in the school bus industry about whether seat belts should be required on school buses, there is general agreement that if seat belts are required at some point, the requirement should be for lap/shoulder belts.

Furthermore, the requirement that no bus be operated unless all occupants under 16 are wearing a seat belt causes the potential need for an additional adult on the bus to monitor seat belt use or the use of costly electronic devices like those in many automobiles that detect whether each seating position is occupied and then alerts the bus operator when there is an occupant whose seat belt is not buckled. Also, making a distinction between students 16 or older and those under the age of 16 leads to potential confusion for bus operators or another adult to monitor seat belt usage and creates the need for those adults to know the ages of students. This information is not currently needed on the bus.

Finally, this bill removes a long-standing provision in COMAR that allows standees in emergency situations — a provision that allows buses, particularly in the beginning of the school year when loads are uncertain, to permit additional students on the bus rather than leave them at a bus stop with no supervision.

Phone 301-279-3617 ♦ Fax 301-279-3860 ♦ boe@mcpsmd.org ♦ www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org  
For these reasons, we oppose this bill and ask for an unfavorable report.