

## **Testimony in support of HB2008 House Transportation Committee, January 25, 2017**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to talk with you about the important topic of seat belts on school buses. This same bill, HB2008 has been introduced before. In fact, it was introduced in 2004, 2006, and 2007. So what has changed? The use of seat belts on school buses has long been debated and is the hottest question in school bus safety. School buses are designed to promote safety using the concept of compartmentalization. Compartmentalization in school buses is the design concept using tall seat backs, padded with energy-absorbing construction covering all metal parts, and spacing that is closer than typically found in passenger vehicles. According to the American Pediatric Association, "Data from real-world crashes comparing seat belt use versus compartmentalization only do not exist. However, recent studies have revealed that compartmentalization does not offer optimal protection and is not consistent with current technology and messages for children and families regarding the use of car safety seats and seat belts in all motor vehicles."

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) had been neutral on the issue of seat belts until November 2015 when Dr. Mark Rosekind, the NHTSA administrator announced the agency's support of the use of seat belts on school buses. In a speech to the National Association for Public Transportation, Dr. Rosekind announced new policy that "the position of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is that seat belts save lives. That is true whether in a passenger car or in a big yellow bus. And saving lives is what we are about. So NHTSA's policy is that every child on every school bus should have a three-point seat belt."

In researching the use of seat belts on school buses the issue of the increased cost of buses equipped with seat belts was a frequently cited barrier for school districts. So, at what point does the cost of a school bus become more important than the life of a child? The cost is estimated to be between \$7,000-10,000 per bus depending on the size of the bus as well as other factors. To the parents of the six children killed in the November 2016 Tennessee school bus accident or the 23 children who were injured, the cost may not seem unreasonable. The price may seem high unless it is your child or your grandchild.

According to NHTSA, between 2005 and 2014, 106 school bus passengers or drivers were killed. That is an average of about 5 school age children a year. 2016 was obviously more deadly. Countless other children and adults have been injured in school bus accidents.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Crashes</b>	<b>Bus Drivers Killed</b>	<b>Passengers Killed</b>	<b>Passengers Age ≤ 18 Killed</b>
2005	9	5	5	4
2006	5	3	5	4
2007	4	4	1	1
2008	13	4	15	14
2009	4	2	3	3
2010	15	6	9	9
2011	10	7	4	3
2012	10	6	8	8
2013	7	4	4	3
2014	6	4	7	3

*SOURCE: Governing calculations of 2005-2014 NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System data.*

I believe that it is time to join the NHSTA, the American Pediatric Association, and the National PTA in recognizing that seat belts on school buses save lives regardless of the cost or inconvenience. The life of a child is priceless, especially if it is your child or your grandchild.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

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