



House Transportation Committee Representative Proehl, chairman

Written testimony: Diane Gjerstad
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

Each school day Wichita Public Schools transports nearly 18,000 students, requiring a minimum of 432 buses daily. The safe transportation of students is a responsibility the district takes very seriously. The children and young adults who ride buses each day are our own family members and neighbors. We strive to provide safe transport from home to school and back home safely each school day.

The District's schools have three different start and end times, which allows about half of the buses to be "tripled tiered" or deliver students at each of the three start times. A large bus costs about \$38,000 plus gas each year, whether it has one run or three. Tiering (multiple runs) allows for one bus to serve multiple schools twice a day, which makes it the most cost effective way to transport 18,000 students to over ninety schools. To make the timing work, the maximum time for each run is forty minutes. Beyond the forty-minute window, students are late for school and missing instruction.

Today's school buses are built for safety. Bus seats encapsulate the students in a compartment-like setting. While no system is entirely failsafe, buses are built to provide superior protection.

The bill would require new buses purchased after January 1, 2018 to be equipped with seatbelts. The addition of seat belts is estimated to increase cost of the fleet \$7000 to \$10,000 per bus, an estimated cost of \$1.5 to \$2 million for the Wichita Public Schools. We believe lap belts would require more driver time to check if students have complied. Mandating seat belts will increase the time required to secure students. Increasing time may exceed the forty-minute window. When this happens students in each subsequent tier are late and miss instruction or additional buses must be added.

While we understand the goal is to provide additional safety for students, it remains unclear as to whether seat belts might delay safe and timely evacuation if needed. One driver may not be able to unbuckle multiple seat belts during a crisis.

Our primary concern is safety. Nationally each year nearly 500 children and teens die in automobile accidents during school hours annually compared to four who die from school buses accidents. Dollars spent on seat belts will compete with other safety features for students and schools, including secure building entrances, camera systems, or tornado shelters.

Mr. Chairman, we are committed to the safety of all of students during the school bus ride and throughout the school day. We urge the committee to allow local school boards and districts to determine what best fits the needs of each community.