



Office of Representative John E. Barnes, Jr.

Thank you, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and my esteemed colleagues on the Education and Career Readiness Committee for the opportunity to give sponsor testimony on House Bill 680, which will require all passenger seats on school buses to be equipped with occupant restraining devices and designate the third full week in October as “Safe School Week.”

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (hereafter NHTSA), there were 324,710 fatal motor vehicle traffic crashes from 2006-2015. Of those crashes, 1,172 (0.4%) were classified as school-transportation-related. A school-transportation-related crash is a crash that involves, either directly or indirectly, a school bus body vehicle, or a non-school bus functioning as a school bus, transporting children to or from school or school-related activities. Between 2006 and 2015, there have been 1,313 people killed in school-transportation-related crashes—an average of 131 fatalities per year. Occupants of school transportation vehicles accounted for 9% of the fatalities.

The NHTSA claims that compartmentalization, which relies on closely-spaced seats that have energy-absorbing seat backs, is the best way to provide crash protection to passengers of school buses. However, this does not work in side impacts or rollovers and it is only effective when children are seated facing forward with their feet on the floor at all times.

House Bill 680 requires any school bus purchased, owned, leased, or rented by a school, school district, person, or governmental entity in the state to be equipped with sufficient occupant restraining devices (seat belts) for every passenger on the school bus, beginning July 1, 2019. The requirement applies to all existing and new school buses that are purchased, owned, leased, or rented, and specifies that the seat belts be threepoint belts (a belt that goes across the shoulder and lap of a person). The bill makes it a minor misdemeanor to fail to provide seat belts on a school bus. For purposes of the bill, a "school" means a community school, a STEM school, a college-preparatory boarding school, a chartered nonpublic school, and a nonchartered nonpublic school. "School districts" include city, exempted village, local and joint vocational school districts. Thus, the bill's requirement applies to any school bus serving any school (kindergarten through high school) in Ohio.

Thank you again for this opportunity, I would be happy to answer any questions.