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OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

Office of Research
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Office

H.B. 279
135th General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for H.B. 279's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Rep. Willis

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: Yes

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Highlights

- The bill's requirement that every school bus be equipped with seat belts within five years will increase costs for school districts and other public schools by between \$282.2 million and \$376.3 million to retrofit the existing bus fleet. The cost of each new bus purchased may increase by about \$14,400 to add seat belts. There may also be additional school bus maintenance costs to repair or replace damaged seat belts.

Detailed Analysis

Overview

Within five years of the bill's effective date, the bill requires every school bus purchased, owned, leased, or rented by a school or school district to be equipped with occupant restraining devices (i.e., seat belts). Specifically, these seat belts are to be a Type 2 seat belt assembly, consisting of a combination lap and over-the-shoulder restraint, that conforms to the requirements of federal motor vehicle safety standards.¹ Each bus must be equipped with enough seat belts for each student to have an individual seat belt. The bill requires the Ohio State Highway Patrol to enforce the seat belt requirement within their regular school bus equipment inspections. Under continuing law, the Director of Public Safety, in consultation with the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW), adopts rules and regulations related to the construction, design, and equipment of all publicly and privately owned and operated school buses.

¹ 49 Code of Federal Regulations 571.

Seat belt installation

According to DEW, 3,353 (15%) of the 22,952 school buses reported in school and school district inventory are currently equipped with seat belts. This leaves 19,599 (85%) of these buses that are not currently equipped with seat belts. The cost of equipping these buses may range from approximately \$282.2 million to \$376.3 million, depending on several factors including the cost of installing a three-point seat belt (Type 2), material and labor, and the cost to retrofit buses not “seat belt ready” by replacing the back of each seat.

Based on estimates provided by DEW via a vendor that performs sales and maintenance on school buses in Franklin County, the minimum cost to retrofit a school bus with seat belts is about \$600 per seat. This estimate assumes a bus has seat backs that are “seat belt ready” and includes \$500 for the belts and other materials and \$100 for labor. We assume each bus is equipped with an average of 24 seats, each seating two children, which yields an estimated minimum cost per bus of \$14,400 (\$600 per seat x 24 seats). This also represents the marginal minimum cost to equip each new school bus with seat belts, since these new school buses are already “seat belt ready.” Retrofitting a school bus that is not “seat belt ready” requires an additional approximately \$200 per seat to replace the seatbacks, for a total of roughly \$800 per seat. This yields an estimated maximum cost per bus of \$19,200 (\$800 per seat x 24 seats). As a point of reference, DEW reports that the purchase price of a new model year 2018-2022 school bus averaged \$95,000.²

Estimated Cost of Installing Seat Belts on Existing School Buses			
	Cost Per Seat	Cost Per Bus	Total Cost
Minimum cost	\$600	\$14,400	\$282.2 million
Maximum cost	\$800	\$19,200	\$376.3 million

Presumably, the actual costs will fall somewhere between the minimum or maximum estimate depending on implementation decisions that will vary from school to school and bus to bus. Buses may vary in seating capacity and configuration.

Note also that, although the General Assembly appropriated funds to assist school districts with the purchase of new school buses from FY 2021 to FY 2023, it did not do so for FY 2024 and FY 2025.

Potential additional costs

There may be additional costs associated with installing seat belts on school buses beyond installation. A typical school bus seat without seat belts can hold three young children or two teenagers. Many of the seats that include seat belts hold a maximum of two children of any age, which could reduce the capacity of many buses. Accordingly, some schools or school districts may need to purchase additional school buses in order to transport the same number of students.

² See the DEW [School Bus Purchase Program Fiscal Year 2023 guidance \(PDF\)](#), which may be accessed by conducting a keyword “School Bus Purchase Program” search on DEW’s website: education.ohio.gov.

Also, annual school bus maintenance costs may increase, as damaged seat belts are repaired or replaced.

Ohio State Highway Patrol

The bill's requirement that the Ohio State Highway Patrol enforce the school bus seat belt requirement is not expected to have a discernible impact, as the Patrol currently inspects school buses and seat belts would just be an additional item added to the existing inspection criteria.