

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HEARING ON H.B. 279:

RUDOLPH J. BREGLIA, PhD

I'm a citizen advocate for seat belts in school buses with no commercial interests and have been working on the Issue for nearly seven years. I know that we are all on the same page and want the safest form of transportation for our children and we all realize that having a seat belt on in a crash is a really good idea. The reason I'm sitting here today is a school bus rollover crash occurred in Chattanooga TN in November of 2016. Six children aged 6-10 years old were killed, three were ejected from the bus just like Aiden Clark from Clark County and 26 were injured and I put myself in the shoes of the parents of those kids. The only one uninjured was the school bus driver because he had his seat belt on. Ohio school bus drivers have seat belts since 1986, while all cars have them since 1968. Please don't misunderstand. I don't want parents to lose faith in the safety of school buses, but I want that safety to be enhanced with a basic safety tool, seat belts. The next Ohio school bus crash is not a question of "if" but one of "when". Avon Lake, my home town had a concussion injury in a minor bus crash last November.

Today I would like to give you a taste of this complex issue with a lot of moving parts, but I can assure you that my only goal is to help school districts handle the "Seat Belts in School Buses Issue" and overcome any perceived difficulties. My other goals are to alert the community to this school bus safety concern and thereby prompt preventative action by school districts and third to acquire private and/or public funds for voluntary school districts to conduct Pilot Programs where at least one new school bus would be equipped with seat belts.

Ohio legislators have a general responsibility for the safety of everyone in Ohio, including sharing responsibility for the safety of children with the school districts. My purpose today is to have the Transportation Committee consider supporting H. B. 279 to enhance the safety of school buses by providing lap-shoulder seat belts to protect our children during transport. The cities of Lorain, Vermilion and Sandusky have already recommended that their school districts consider Seat Belt Installation Pilot Programs and the school districts of Avon Lake, Hudson and Beachwood have purchased new school buses with seat belts for all passengers. Whenever I mention "seat belts" today I'm talking about lap-shoulder seat belts, the same seat belts that are in every passenger car. Currently the Governor's School Bus Safety Working Group is presently reviewing data and hearing from experts on school bus safety including Dr. K Poland of NTSB on US school bus crashes and lessons learned, Sgt. Trevor Jasper from OSHP on Ohio crash data and Dr. J. Mansfield and Dr. A. Agnew of Ohio State on Children's injuries and prevention (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZZyDXfDsmo>)

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Significant Seat Belt Safety Conclusions

1. Children are routinely killed & injured in school bus crashes & sudden stops. In the US every year, 4-5 Kids are killed & 17,000 injured. Two Ohio fatalities occurred since 2010 and one of

those, Aiden Clark of Clark County last August. In Ohio during the years 2018-2022 a total of 767 injuries were found for kids as bus occupants in 258 crashes. Ohio school buses are not SAFE by definition (free from harm or risk) since kids are being injured and killed.

2. Current Ohio school bus safety features are **INADEQUATE** to protect children fully from injury & death in school bus incidents

3. Compartmentalization or the Padded Seat Back Theory that was labeled as “INCOMPLETE” by the NTSB in 1999, is the primary school bus safety theory that routinely fails in certain crash types (rollovers, side and spinouts) with serious consequences for the children. Even when the theory is functioning according to design, kids are propelled forward and hit the seat back in front of them with their faces at nearly the speed of the bus before an accident and producing head injuries.

4. Over the lifetime of the bus, the cost for adding seat belts to a new school bus is \$5/student/year or <0.5% of the total cost of \$1000 for transporting a student for a year

5. ~1200 school bus crashes occur every year in Ohio (OSHP)

6. Recommendations (NHTSA¹-NTSB²-NSC-OH PTA³) support the installation of seat belts in school buses & government requirements {18% (9) of States & Cities (Indianapolis, IN & Beachwood, OH with 10 buses)}

7. Substantial evidence already exists for seat belts being considered a “Standard of Care” for school bus safety & installation delay in school buses could be considered negligence.

8. Seat Belts improve student behavior and decrease driver distractions and decrease driver-caused crashes and may increase driver retention

9. School districts have increased the risk for unlimited compensatory damage awards in litigation from bus crashes where seat belts are not available (Ohio Tort Liability Act). School districts are gambling that a significant crash will not occur to their kids.

10. Three Ohio City Councils (Sandusky-Lorain-Vermilion) have recommended that their school districts conduct Seat Belt Installation Pilot Programs.

SUMMARY STATEMENT: Seat belts are proven effective for protecting children; behavior improvers; low-cost; safety tested; required in some states, cities & school districts; widely recommended; federal/state allowed; in every passenger car; & a basic safety tool that resolves the most significant current bus inadequacy. Seat belts don't delay exiting in an emergency, our children have the safety habit and can safely and quickly operate seat belts from daily experience in their parents' cars and school bus drivers don't need to fear increased liability by having seat belts installed.

The installation of seat belts is a substantial, recognized, and critical improvement to school bus safety and should be a priority for all of us. Seat belts are like Fire Extinguishers in that they are an absolutely needed precaution to avoid catastrophic loss.

Crashes: <https://youtu.be/KbCciy8ePds> (Rollover Simulation);

<https://www.yahoo.com/gma/parents-know-dangers-side-impact-030745394.html> (Semi vs. School Bus Crash Demonstration at 35mph);

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW7KOZNtn0w> (Actual)

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/video-shows-inside-ohio-school-bus-it-overturns-students-onboard-n1134941> (Perry County-Thornville, Ohio 2020 Crash)

¹ Remarks: National Association for Pupil Transportation | NHTSA Mark R. Rosekind, Ph.D., Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, Richmond, Va., Sunday, November 8, 2015

²NTSB Reiterates Call for Lap and Shoulder Seatbelts in All School Buses, 11/22 <https://www.nts.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/NR20221103.aspx>

³Ohio PTA Position Statement, 2022 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_gdupw-fKU-h-olHptFe0wVcXjARvWhW/edit

Rudolph J. Breglia PhD
(610) 883-2863 or (440) 930-0251
rudybreglia@gmail.com

Say good words, do the right things and think happy ideas.

~ 說好話, 做好事, 想快樂的念頭! ~