

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2639

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 25, 2016

Title: An act relating to studying the costs and benefits of requiring school bus safety devices on new school buses.

Brief Description: Increasing the safety of school bus riders.

Sponsors: Representatives McCabe, Santos, Johnson, Kochmar, Cody, Caldier, Muri, Kilduff and McBride.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/10/16, 87-9.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/22/16, 2/25/16 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Litzow, Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; McAuliffe, Ranking Member; Billig, Fain, Hill, Mullet, Rivers and Rolfes.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: The Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards require compartmentalization for passenger seating and crash protection in large school buses that weigh over 10,000 pounds. Compartmentalization consists of closely spaced, impact-absorbing, high-back, padded student seats.

State law authorizes the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to adopt and enforce rules governing the design, marking, and operation of school buses transporting public school students. SPI's rules define a school bus as a vehicle with the seating capacity of more than 10 persons, including the driver, used to transport students to and from school or in connection with school activities. The definition does not include the transportation of students via a municipal transit system.

SPI's rules and bus specifications do not require school buses to provide seat belts for students riding the bus; however, a lap-shoulder belt must be provided for the driver. Seat belt systems for student passengers may be installed as a school district option. Washington school bus specifications require that any seat belt system on a bus built after September

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2006 must be a lap-shoulder system. SPI rules require students on school buses equipped with seat belts to wear the belt when the school bus is moving.

The SPI online bus inventory reports 12,198 active school buses are operating in the state.

Summary of Bill: The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must conduct a study to analyze the costs, benefits, detriments, feasibility, and funding options for requiring each school bus purchased after December 2017 to be equipped with seat belts, safety harnesses, or other approved restraint systems for all passengers. By October 15, 2016, the OSPI must submit a report with the results of the study and recommendations to the appropriate committees of the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We are sending mixed messages to our children and confusing them by requiring them to wear a seatbelt when they ride with their family in a car but are not requiring them to do so when they ride with a stranger on a school bus. Last December, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reversed its longstanding policy and now endorses seat belts on school buses. The newer lap-shoulder belts are completely flush with the seats so the belts cannot be used as a weapon, and permits buses to be outfitted to accommodate more than two students to a bus seat. OSPI has estimated that the study can be done within existing resources.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative McCabe, Prime Sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.