

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5054

As of January 25, 2017

Title: An act relating to student transportation safety.

Brief Description: Requiring safety belts in school buses.

Sponsors: Senators Dansel, Darneille and Rolfes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/24/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that all private and public school buses that are purchased after the effective date of this bill have a safety belt for each bus rider.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Kellee Keegan (786-7429)

Background: Under current law, school buses are not required to provide seat belts for students riding the bus.

The current mandatory seat belt law requires all persons 16 years of age or older riding in a vehicle to wear a seat belt. All person's operating a motor vehicle must ensure that passengers under the age of 16 years are either wearing a seat belt or securely fastened into an approved child restraint device. Any person violating this law has committed a traffic infraction. School buses are currently not included in the definition of motor vehicle for the purpose of this section.

The operation of each local school district's student transportation program is the responsibility of each district's board of directors. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in consultation with the transportation coordinators of the educational service districts, establishes the criteria required for purchasing school buses in regards to capacity and type as well as the competitive specifications for each category of school bus. Those specifications are required to meet federal motor vehicle safety standards as well as meet standards developed in rule by the OSPI.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: In addition to other standards developed by the OSPI, all public and private school buses purchased after the effective date of this bill must have a safety belt for each bus rider.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Safety belts on buses has gained a lot of attention in the last few years because of tragic accidents in other states. To insure the best prices for schools, the start date should change to September 1st. The technology for seats on buses changed eight years ago so the capacity on school buses is not reduced when they have seatbelts. This means that there is no longer a need to hire more drivers or purchase more buses if the state chooses to require them.

CON: This bill is being opposed because of practical concerns. The basic idea is good. However, as a driver, it is their responsibility to insure students are buckled up. Younger children are hard to see in the seats and they unbuckle their seatbelts. Concept is great, but there needs to be a way for a driver to insure the students are buckled. In an emergency, getting younger children out of the vehicle is difficult for one driver to control.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Allan Jones, citizen; Glenn Gorton, OSPI.

CON: Brian Lange, citizen.

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