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OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

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H.B. 279
135th General Assembly

Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Rep. Willis

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SUMMARY

- Within five years of the bill's effective date, 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) for every student transported on the school bus.
- Requires the Ohio State Highway Patrol to enforce the seat belt requirement as part of its regular inspections of school bus equipment.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Seat belts on school buses

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). It specifies that there must be enough seat belts on the bus for each student riding the bus to use a separate seat belt. Schools and school districts must comply with the requirement within five years after the bill's effective date. The Ohio State Highway Patrol must enforce the seat belt requirement within their regular school bus equipment inspections.¹

Under the bill, a school is a community school, STEM school, a college-preparatory boarding school, a chartered nonpublic school, and a nonchartered nonpublic school. A school district includes a city, exempted village, local, and joint vocational school district. Thus, the bill's requirements apply to any school bus serving any school (kindergarten through high school) in Ohio.²

¹ R.C. 4511.773(B) and (C).

² R.C. 4511.773(A).

Current law generally requires the Director of Public Safety, in consultation with the Department of Education and Workforce, to adopt rules and regulations related to the construction, design, and equipment of all publicly and privately owned and operated school buses. Additionally, the law requires some specific equipment for school buses (e.g., a seat belt for the driver of a school bus).³

Federal law

Federal law and regulations establish minimum standards for the design of and equipment for school buses. A state, however, can establish stricter equipment requirements than those established at the federal level for school buses registered within that state. Currently, federal law requires small school buses (those with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less) to be equipped with either lap or lap/shoulder seat belts at all designated seating positions.⁴ Conversely, larger school buses are not required to have passenger seat belts installed. However, as of 2018, the National Transportation Safety Board (in a nonbinding opinion) recommends passenger seat belt installation on all school buses, regardless of size.⁵

Currently, at least nine states (Arkansas, California, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, and Texas) have passed laws or adopted rules requiring passenger seat belts on school buses. However, in several states occupant restraining device installation has not been implemented due to funding issues and, in other states, implementation of the requirement is at the discretion of each school district.⁶

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	09-20-23

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³ R.C. 4511.76 and 4511.772, not in the bill.

⁴ 49 Code of Federal Regulations 571.222.

⁵ See the National Transportation Safety Board's Special Investigation Report "[Selective Issues in School Bus Transportation Safety: Crashes in Baltimore, Maryland, and Chattanooga, Tennessee](#)" (PDF) which can be accessed on the NTSC website at: [ntsb.gov](https://www.ntsb.gov).

⁶ See "[School Bus Safety](#)." National Conference of State Legislatures. Updated September 1, 2022. Found on NCSL's website at: [ncsl.org](https://www.ncsl.org).