

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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C.S.S.B. 693
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Transportation
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Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Seat belts are mandatory safety devices that have been required in vehicles for decades. This life-saving equipment should be available to the approximately 1.5 million children who ride a bus to and from school and events each day. With no equipment restraining the students in their seats, and buses being prone to rollover accidents, children can be thrown around and even ejected from a bus. Multiple school bus accidents in Texas have led to fatalities and caused injuries that could have been prevented if these buses were equipped with three-point seat belts. The goal of this legislation is to protect children, prevent injuries, and demonstrate that the State of Texas is serious about the safety of schoolchildren.

In 2007, the 80th Legislature passed H.B. 323, "Ashley and Alicia's Law," requiring every school bus and school activity bus purchased by a school district on or after September 1, 2010, or chartered by a district on or after September 1, 2011, to be equipped with a three-point seat belt for each passenger and the operator contingent on state funding.

In the intervening decade, three-point seat belt technology is now mandatory on all motor coaches nationwide and costs for the technology have also declined. Further, it is now the stated policy of the National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA) that "every child on every school bus should have a three-point seatbelt...School buses should have seat belts. Period."

Studies have also shown that three-point seat belts increase discipline and reduce cases of bullying on school buses. Recognizing the danger, Dallas County schools and Austin Independent School District (I.S.D.) have followed the law without state funding. Due to a number of fatalities, Beaumont I.S.D. and Houston I.S.D. have announced similar, self-funded programs beginning this year.

S.B. 693 would require three-point seat belts on all new school buses purchased by a school district that are model year 2017 or newer; and would apply to a school activity bus, multifunction school activity bus, or school-chartered bus. By having allowed more than a decade to implement H.B. 323, school districts will now be able to integrate the law in a more cost effective manner. (Original Author's / Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

C.S.S.B. 693 amends current law relating to three-point seat belts on buses that transport schoolchildren.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 547.701(e), Transportation Code, as follows:

(e) Provides that, in this subsection, "bus" includes a school bus, school activity bus, multifunction school activity bus, or school-chartered bus, rather than a school bus and a school activity bus. Provides that this subsection does not apply to a bus purchased by a school district (district) that is a model year 2017 or earlier or a bus purchased by a

district that is a model year 2018 or later if the board of trustees for the district determines that the district's budget does not permit the district to purchase a bus that is equipped with the required seat belts and votes to approve that determination in a public meeting. Deletes existing Subdivisions (1) and (2), providing that this subsection applies to each bus purchased by a district on or after September 1, 2010, for the transportation of schoolchildren and each schoolcharted bus contracted for use by a district on or after September 1, 2011, for the transportation of schoolchildren.

SECTION 2. Repealer: Section 547.701(f) (relating to requiring a school district to comply only to the extent that the legislature has appropriated money for the purpose of reimbursing school districts for expenses), Transportation Code.

SECTION 3. Provides that it is the public policy of this state to ensure the safety of all students by taking every measure possible to protect the lives and well-being of students during transportation on a bus to and from school and extracurricular activities, including the measure enacted in Section 547.701(e), Transportation Code, as amended by this Act.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2017.