

**DENI TAVERAS**  
*Legislative District 47B*  
Prince George's County

Health and Government  
Operations Committee

*Subcommittees*

Government Operations  
and Health Facilities

Insurance and Pharmaceuticals



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 206  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3101 · 301-858-3101  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3101  
Deni.Taveras@house.state.md.us

**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts HB196 Testimony of Maryland State Delegate  
Deni Taveras**

Thank you, Chairman Korman, and committee members. It is an honor to be before this esteemed body once again. I am here to ask for your favorable report on HB196 - Seat Belts on School Buses.

This bill addresses the safety of children on school buses and proposes seat belts on buses to enhance student safety during school bus transportation. The bill mandates the installation of seat belts on future school buses. This legislation aims to strike a balance between improving safety through seat belts and acknowledging existing safety measures in school buses.

The importance of this bill is highlighted by the fact that only 8 states currently require seatbelts on buses. Furthermore, between 2011 and 2020, there were 1,009 fatal school-transportation-related crashes resulting in 1,125 fatalities, averaging 113 fatalities per year. This includes 113 school transportation vehicle occupants, with 53 drivers and 60 passengers among the deceased.

Recent studies, including one conducted in Alabama, have concluded that seatbelts can make school buses safer. This finding is further supported by states like California, Florida, and New York, which require new buses to be equipped with seatbelts. Moreover, the potential for improved student behavior on buses equipped with seatbelts cannot be overlooked. For instance, the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation of Columbus, Indiana, reported a significant decrease in disciplinary write-ups for misbehaving students in buses with seat belts.

While it is true that school buses are designed with safety in mind and employ 'compartmentalization' to protect passengers, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has pointed out that this protection is incomplete. It does not sufficiently safeguard passengers during side-impact crashes or rollovers. The tragic school bus crash in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the absence of seatbelts was a contributing factor, underscores the urgency of this issue.

Additionally, a recent accident in Howard County, where a school bus carrying 19 students from Hammond Middle School overturned, resulted in several students being hospitalized. This

incident underestimates the potential safety risks associated with school bus travel, despite the overall safety record of bus transportation.

Moreover, this bill is about taking a proactive approach to ensure the safety of our children. It aligns with the evolving standards of school transportation safety and responds to the concerns of parents, educators, and the community at large. While Maryland's school buses are among the safest forms of transportation, the addition of seatbelts can provide an extra layer of protection, potentially saving lives and increasing peace of mind for all involved.

In closing, as such I ask this esteemed committee for your favorable report on HB196.