

# National Transportation Safety Board

Office of the Chair

Washington, DC 20594



February 15, 2024

The Honorable Deni Taveras  
Maryland General Assembly  
206 Lowe House Office Bldg.  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Taveras:

As Chair of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), I would like to thank you for introducing HB 196, legislation that would require occupant restraining devices to be installed in every school bus purchased after October 1, 2024. The NTSB has recommended Maryland enact legislation to require that all new large school buses be equipped with passenger lap/shoulder belts for all passenger seating positions since 2018.<sup>1</sup> It's currently classified as open-unacceptable response.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—highway, rail, pipeline, marine, and commercial space. We determine the probable cause of the events we investigate and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences.

School buses are the safest vehicles on the road, and one of the safest modes of transportation overall. School buses use a unique technology called compartmentalization—a passive occupant protection system to protect children in crash. School bus seats are made with an energy-absorbing steel inner structure and high, padded seat backs, and are secured to the school bus floor. Students are protected within the seating compartment much like eggs in a carton. However, we have completed numerous investigations that identified occupant protection as a safety issue in school bus transportation, where compartmentalization alone was not enough to prevent all injuries and that, for some of the children involved, a seat belt could have lessened their injuries or even saved their lives.

The results of our investigations and the research relating to school bus safety is clear: properly worn lap/shoulder belts provide the highest level of protection for

---

<sup>1</sup> [data.nts.gov/carol-main-public/sr-details/H-18-010](https://data.nts.gov/carol-main-public/sr-details/H-18-010)

school bus passengers in all crash scenarios, including rollovers and frontal, side, and rear impacts. As a result of our school bus crash investigations, we believe—and have recommended—that, when investing in new school buses, the purchased vehicles should provide children with the best protection available, which includes lap/shoulder seat belts.

We look forward to Maryland approving this strong measure to address school bus safety. This important legislation will provide the best protection for children on school buses, and I appreciate your efforts to advance this measure.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Homendy  
Chair