



Senate Bill 183

School Vehicles – Seat Belts - Requirements

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 2, 2016

From: Robin Clark Eilenberg, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 183. The bill would require every school vehicle registered in Maryland to be equipped with seat belts for every seat in the vehicle.

SB 183 creates a new and costly requirement for school buses. MACo appreciates the bill's underlying goal of improving student safety on school vehicles. The reason for MACo's opposition is not the policy change; the reason is the cost of the mandate.

Achieving the aims of the bill through either retrofitting existing school buses or purchasing new school buses has been estimated to cost more than \$50 million. At the same time, the bill does not envision any state funding for this purpose.

Maryland county governments partner with the State to provide funding to Maryland local school boards. Last year, county governments provided almost half of their operating budgets (\$7.8 billion) and a more than a quarter of their capital budgets (\$1.1 billion) to K-12 education. The Governor's proposed budget for the coming year includes \$5.5 billion in operating funds for K-12 education and \$314 million in school construction capital.

Maryland school boards do not have independent ability to raise revenue. They are completely dependent on county, state, and federal funding. As this bill does not reference any state or federal funding, it is a mandate that requires 100% local funding.

In the past, the State has created dedicated funds to help county governments improve student safety. For example, in 2014, the State created a \$25 million school security initiative. A similar State commitment is not part of this legislation.

Without a State partnership to reach the policy aims of SB 183, this legislation represents an unfunded mandate on local school boards. For these reasons, MACo requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report.