

STATE OF NEW YORK

4413

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

February 4, 2021

Introduced by M. of A. ABINANTI -- read once and referred to the Committee on Transportation

AN ACT to amend the vehicle and traffic law and the education law, in relation to implementing combination lap safety and shoulder harness seat safety belts and requiring students use safety belts on school buses

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Subdivision 5 of section 383 of the vehicle and traffic law, as added by chapter 747 of the laws of 1986, is amended to read as follows:

5. (a) Passenger seat safety belts for school buses. Every school bus, as defined in section one hundred forty-two of this chapter, manufactured for use in this state on and after July first, [~~nineteen hundred eighty-seven~~] two thousand twenty-two, shall be designed so that all passenger seats on such vehicle are equipped with combination lap safety and shoulder harness seat safety belts and increased seat back padding on passenger seats of a type and specification as approved by the commissioner of transportation through the adoption of rules and regulations. Such rules and regulations shall provide that when any contactable surface of the school bus, as specified in the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard, 49 CFR Section 571.222, is impacted from any direction at twenty-two feet per second by the head form, the axial acceleration at the center of gravity of the head form shall be such that the head form impact requirement shall not exceed eight hundred.

(b) Passenger combination lap safety and shoulder harness seat safety belts for existing school buses. [~~Any~~] Every school bus, as defined in section one hundred forty-two of this chapter, which is scheduled for retrofitting pursuant to action by a board of education or board of trustees under section thirty-six hundred thirty-five-a of the education law not equipped with combination lap safety and shoulder harness seat

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [~~-~~] is old law to be omitted.

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1 safety belts shall be retrofitted so that all passenger seats on such
2 vehicles are equipped with combination lap safety and shoulder harness
3 seat safety belts and additional padding of a type and specification as
4 approved by the commissioner of transportation through the adoption of
5 rules and regulations. Such rules and regulations shall provide that
6 when any contactable surface of the school bus as specified in the
7 Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard, 49CFR Section 571.222 is impacted
8 from any direction at twenty-two feet per second by the head form, the
9 axial acceleration at the center of gravity of the head form shall be
10 such that the head form impact requirement shall not exceed eight
11 hundred. Furthermore, the commissioner shall have the power through
12 rules and regulations to exempt certain design school buses from retro-
13 fitting. In granting such exemptions, the commissioner shall consider
14 safety factors, structural integrity of the school buses and any other
15 items deemed necessary to preserve the safety and welfare of the school
16 bus passengers. Provided further, however, that the commissioner of
17 transportation shall not authorize retrofitting of any school bus manu-
18 factured prior to April first, [~~nineteen hundred seventy-seven~~] two
19 thousand twenty-two.

20 § 2. Section 3635-a of the education law, as added by chapter 747 of
21 the laws of 1986 and subdivision 1 as amended by chapter 474 of the laws
22 of 1996, is amended to read as follows:

23 § 3635-a. Safety belt usage. [~~1. A board of education or board of~~
24 ~~trustees may, in its discretion, following a public hearing for the~~
25 ~~purpose of determining whether a resolution shall be adopted, provide~~
26 ~~for the use of seat safety belts on such school buses, in accordance~~
27 ~~with regulations and standards established by the commissioner under~~
28 ~~subdivision one of section thirty-six hundred thirty-eight of this chap-~~
29 ~~ter.~~

30 ~~2. Such public hearing, conducted upon reasonable notice, shall be~~
31 ~~held to consider: (a) whether the district shall install seat safety~~
32 ~~belts on buses purchased and/or contracted for prior to the effective~~
33 ~~date of this section and require their use; (b) when such installation~~
34 ~~shall be provided, and (c) whether use of seat safety belts shall be~~
35 ~~required on all school buses within the district so equipped after a~~
36 ~~date to be determined by the board of education or board of trustees.~~

37 ~~3. Such hearings shall consider the effect of seat safety belts~~
38 ~~installation on the total number of students that can be transported on~~
39 ~~such buses.~~

40 ~~4. Within twenty days after the public hearing, the board of education~~
41 ~~or board of trustees shall, by resolution, determine whether to require~~
42 ~~installation and use of seat safety belts on some or all school buses.]~~

43 1. All students shall use safety belts while being transported on
44 school buses, in accordance with regulations and standards established
45 by the commissioner; provided, however, alternative accommodations shall
46 be made where a pupil with special needs is unable to utilize a safety
47 belt.

48 [~~5.~~] 2. This section shall apply only to vehicles owned or leased by
49 school districts and nonpublic schools, and to vehicles used to perform
50 contracts with such school districts and nonpublic schools for the
51 purpose of transporting school children for hire.

52 [~~6.~~] 3. Nothing in this section shall be construed to impose a duty
53 upon boards of education or boards of trustees to provide seat safety
54 belts on school buses purchased or contracted for prior to the effective
55 date of this section, nor shall any board of education or board of trus-
56 tees be held liable for failure to provide seat safety belts pursuant to

1 this section. A school board member or trustee shall have immunity from
2 any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or
3 imposed as a result of the provisions of this section provided that such
4 person shall have acted in good faith. For the purpose of any proceeding,
5 civil or criminal, the good faith of any such person shall be
6 presumed.

7 ~~[7-]~~ 4. The provisions of this section shall not apply to school
8 districts which are using safety belts on school buses or have installed
9 or have contracted for the installation of seat safety belts prior to
10 the effective date of this section.

11 § 3. Paragraph (a) of subdivision 4 of section 1229-c of the vehicle
12 and traffic law, as amended by chapter 448 of the laws of 2015, is
13 amended to read as follows:

14 (a) "motor vehicle" shall include all motor vehicles which are
15 required by section three hundred eighty-three of this chapter or regulation
16 or would be required if such motor vehicle were registered in New
17 York state to be equipped ~~[by a safety belt but shall not include]~~ with
18 safety belts, including those vehicles which are used as school buses,
19 as such term is defined in section one hundred forty-two of this chapter
20 ~~[and]; provided, however, that the term "motor vehicle" shall not~~
21 include those vehicles which are authorized emergency vehicles, as such
22 term is defined in section one hundred one of this chapter, provided,
23 however, that for purposes of this section, "motor vehicle" shall also
24 include fire vehicles owned and/or operated by a fire company as defined
25 by subdivision two of section one hundred of the general municipal law
26 and ambulances owned and/or operated by a voluntary ambulance service as
27 defined by subdivision three of section one hundred of the general
28 municipal law;

29 § 4. Subdivision 11 of section 1229-c of the vehicle and traffic law,
30 as added by chapter 653 of the laws of 1989 and as renumbered by chapter
31 104 of the laws of 1991, is amended and a new subdivision 11-a is added
32 to read as follows:

33 11. ~~[Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision four of this~~
34 ~~section, no]~~ No person shall operate a school bus unless such person is
35 reasonably sure that all passengers under the age of four are restrained
36 in a specially designed detachable or removable seat as required by
37 subdivision one of this section, or another restraining device approved
38 by the commissioner.

39 11-a. No person shall operate a school bus equipped with seat safety
40 belts pursuant to subdivision five of section three hundred eighty-three
41 of this chapter or pursuant to section thirty-six hundred thirty-five-a
42 of the education law unless such person is reasonably sure that all
43 passengers are restrained by a seat safety belt, provided that the term
44 "passenger" shall not include school bus attendants or any other person
45 acting in a supervisory capacity for purposes of this section. Further-
46 more, in any action for personal injuries by a passenger on a school
47 bus, the provisions of subdivision four of section thirty-eight hundred
48 thirteen of the education law shall apply.

49 § 5. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022. Effective immediately,
50 the addition, amendment and/or repeal of any rule or regulation necessary
51 for the implementation of this act on its effective date are
52 authorized to be made and completed on or before such effective date.