

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5114

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Education*

Title: An act relating to student transportation.

Brief Description: Requiring safety enhancements for student transportation.

Sponsor(s): Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Murray, Bailey, Bauer, Thorsness, Erwin, Gaspard, A. Smith, Rinehart, Madsen, Talmadge, Wojahn, Rasmussen, Conner and Snyder; by request of Task Force on Student Transportation Safety).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Education, March 28, 1991, DPA.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 16 members: Representatives Peery, Chair; G. Fisher, Vice Chair; Brough, Ranking Minority Member; Vance, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Betrozoff; Broback; Brumsickle; Cole; P. Johnson; Jones; Neher; Orr; Phillips; Rasmussen; H. Sommers; and Valle.

Staff: Robert Butts (786-7111).

Background: The Task Force on Student Transportation Safety was established in 1989 by ESHB 2066 to develop recommendations for reducing the dangers children face as they travel to and from school. Among its 11 recommendations are equipping school buses with crossing arms and providing bus drivers additional resources to maintain discipline on buses.

School bus crossing arms

Approximately 45 pedestrians are killed annually nationwide each year in school bus/pedestrian accidents. Eighty percent of the pedestrians killed are students. Two-thirds of the total number of fatalities are struck by the front of the bus. During the last two years, two children in Washington have died after being run over by the front wheels of a bus.

In an effort to reduce the number of school bus/pedestrian accidents, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia have mandated the use of crossing control arms mounted to the front of all school buses. These control arms, when extended, force students to walk at least five feet in front of the bus, which keeps the students within the bus driver's view.

According to reports, the effectiveness of the crossing arms have been demonstrated in several states. Georgia, for example, mandated the crossing arms in 1983, and has not had a front-end bus/pedestrian fatality since the mandate became effective.

Video cameras inside of school buses

Disruptive students on school buses can endanger the lives of the students on the bus and the bus driver. In efforts to deal with this problem, parents, bus drivers, and school officials have considered several options, including the use of paid and volunteer monitors on buses, and the use of videos that could record student behavior.

After reviewing the options, the Task Force on Student Transportation Safety concluded that the widespread use of paid monitors was too expensive; that the use of volunteer monitors was an available option, but that finding dependable, consistent monitors was difficult; and that the use of internal video monitors may be useful. It was felt that the video cameras would be useful in identifying which student was responsible for the disruptive behavior, thus making it easier for the bus driver and school officials to take necessary disciplinary action.

Aides on special education buses

Statewide there are 1,070 school buses used to transport students to and from special education programs. Many of the students riding these buses have serious handicapping conditions, which often makes it difficult for bus drivers to concentrate on driving the bus. Also, loading and unloading students in mobility devices can be difficult for single drivers, and should an accident occur, rapidly evacuating a bus could be difficult.

Hazardous walking conditions

Under current law, the State pays the cost of transporting students who live beyond a one-mile radius of schools. The State also will pay the cost of transporting students who live within a one-mile radius if a determination is made that the student's route to school is hazardous. A formula has been developed for making "hazardous walking condition" determinations, which includes only traffic related considerations. It is thought by some that the definition

should be expanded to also include "social hazards," such as the presence of crack houses, areas with high levels of prostitution, and street violence.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Crossing arms

All school buses owned or contracted by school districts in the state must be equipped with a crossing arm by September 1, 1992. The superintendent of public instruction is responsible for purchasing and distributing the crossing arms by October 1, 1991. School districts are responsible for their installation.

Video cameras inside of school buses

The superintendent of public instruction and at least one school district shall conduct a pilot program to test the feasibility of using video cameras inside school buses to reduce student discipline problems and to assist school bus drivers in identifying students who create problems.

Aides on special education buses

By December 1, 1991, the superintendent of public instruction shall review the current use of aides on special education buses and provide the Legislature with recommended guidelines, with associated fiscal impacts, for increasing the use of aides on special education buses.

Hazardous walking conditions

The superintendent of public instruction, in cooperation with school districts, the State Patrol, and local law enforcement personnel, shall develop a proposed definition and guidelines for implementing an expanded definition of "hazardous walking conditions" that would also include "social hazards." Social hazards to be considered include unacceptable levels of narcotic activity, sex offenders, prostitution, street violence, and environmentally dangerous areas. A proposed definition and guidelines, with associated fiscal impacts, shall be submitted to the Legislature by December 1, 1991.

If funding for the bill is not included in the budget, the bill shall be null and void.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill: The amendments added the study on the use of aides on special education buses, and the review of adding "social hazards" to the definition of hazardous walking conditions.

Fiscal Note: Requested March 19, 1991.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: School bus drivers are required to maintain control of up to 80 children, to drive on busy streets, and to ensure that children are not harmed getting on and off buses. Special education bus drivers have added responsibilities, e.g. helping to load and unload medically fragile children. Bus drivers need additional assistance. In states that have mandated crossing arms, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children hit by school buses.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Senator Murray; Don Carnahan, Superintendent of Public Instruction; Julie and Scott Davidson, citizens; Martha Shreve, Kennewick School District; and Tony Vivenzio, Service Employees Int'l Union.