

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1173

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Education*

Title: An act relating to student transportation.

Brief Description: Requiring safety enhancements for student transportation.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Cole, Holland, Peery, Brumsickle, G. Fisher, Phillips, Jones, Rasmussen, P. Johnson, Winsley, R. King, Pruitt, Wilson, H. Myers, Ogden, Wood, R. Johnson, Vance, Sheldon, Day, Spanel, Leonard, Broback, Paris, Rust, Scott, Haugen, Hine, Cantwell, Betrozoff, Wynne, Nealey, Miller, Bowman, Moyer, Fraser, O'Brien, Sprenkle and Orr; by request of Task Force on Student Transportation Safety.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Education, February 7, 1991, DPA.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 19 members: Representatives Peery, Chair; G. Fisher, Vice Chair; Brough, Ranking Minority Member; Vance, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Betrozoff; Broback; Brumsickle; Cole; Dorn; Holland; P. Johnson; Jones; Neher; Orr; Phillips; Rasmussen; Roland; H. Sommers; and Valle.

Staff: Bob Butts (786-7111).

Background:

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.

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.

In order to address these concerns, school districts statewide employ approximately 100 monitors to assist the bus driver. These school districts are using portions of their special education or transportation funds to pay for the monitors since the State does not directly fund special education monitors. Also, the State does not have standards

for requiring monitors on special education buses, or reimbursing districts for these monitors.

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: By September 1, 1992, every school bus in the State shall be required to have a crossing arm mounted to the front of the bus that will require students who are crossing in the front of the bus to walk more than five feet from the bus.

By March 1, 1992, the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall purchase and distribute these crossing arms for every public school bus owned by, or under contract with, a school district. Installation of the crossing arms shall be the responsibility of the school districts.

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 of school buses to reduce student discipline problems and to assist school bus drivers in identifying students who create problems.

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.

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.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The appropriations are removed (\$745,000), and the bill is made subject to an appropriation in the budget.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Appropriation: Removed.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Testimony For: In the 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: Don Carnahan, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (in favor).