



NAPT 10-26-15 STATEMENT RE: SEAT BELTS on SCHOOL BUSES

Parents should have strong confidence in the safety of their child’s school bus. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) says, “School buses are designed to be safer than passenger vehicles in avoiding crashes and preventing injury” and are “The safest mode of transportation for getting children back and forth to school.”¹

NHTSA also says “[S]eat belts in large school buses may have some effect on reducing the risk of harm in frontal, side and rollover crashes, since seat belts can help restrain occupants within the seat and prevent their ejection and impact with interior surfaces.”²

In July 2015, NHTSA Administrator Mark Rosekind convened a meeting “. . . to discuss how we might better protect children when they ride school buses” after which he promised “[T]he NHTSA team will be able to identify operational and policy challenges and solutions, and explore innovative funding approaches that could serve as a catalyst for change in the coming months.”³ We look forward to hearing, reading, analyzing and discussing what they have to say.

NAPT strongly encourages NHTSA to explain clearly and unambiguously to local officials why optional equipment like seat belts should be selected over other available choices that might also improve school transportation safety. This is important because NHTSA previously said “requiring seat belts on large school buses is likely to have the effect of increasing fatalities related to school transportation” and did an analysis that shows “. . . a National lap/shoulder belt requirement for large school buses could result in an increase of 10 to 19 student fatalities annually in the U.S.”⁴

Absent a federal requirement for belts, NAPT agrees with NHTSA’s last published position: “We believe that it is most appropriate if the decision to order seat belts on large school buses were left to the States and local jurisdictions rather than to NHTSA. States and local school districts are better able to recognize and analyze school

¹ <http://www.nhtsa.gov/School-Buses>

² <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-08-25/html/2011-21596.htm>

³ <https://www.transportation.gov/fastlane/taking-school-bus-safety-new-level>

⁴ Id.

transportation risks particular to their areas and identify approaches to best manage and reduce those safety risks. Local officials are in the best position to decide whether to purchase seat belts, since the officials must weigh a multitude of unique considerations bearing on purchasing decisions, especially when faced with budgetary constraints.”⁵

⁵ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-08-25/html/2011-21596.htm>