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## Change state law to put seatbelts on school buses

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Three elementary school students suffered minor injuries last week when the school bus they were riding in was involved in a head-on crash in Erie that sent the bus into a ditch.

Would everyone have been OK if all of the kids had been wearing seatbelts? That's impossible to say, but it goes to the heart of a debate in Colorado over Senate Bill 29, which would require seatbelts in all new school buses beginning next year.

Proponents say it's a simple matter of safety: Seatbelts save lives and the extra money to outfit new buses with the safety devices is worth every penny if it saves even one child's life.

Opponents point to the fact that it's been 20 years since a child died in a school bus accident in Colorado. In a time of tight budgets, they say, it's not wise to force school districts to spend extra money on something that isn't necessary.

The fact that only one school bus death has been recorded in Colorado since 1989 is not sufficient justification for opposing this worthy idea. And it's not evidence that school buses are safer than any other motor vehicle. Chances are, we have simply been lucky here in Colorado.

This is a chance for our Legislature to be proactive, to see the potential for a deadly situation and act now to avert it before it occurs.

If a school bus were to veer off the road and start rolling down a long embankment, students would be thrown from their seats like rag dolls. We have seen enough casino bus crashes to know how deadly this situation can be. Seatbelts would most certainly improve their chances to escape death or serious injury.

And there's also the mixed message we are sending our children.

Every time kids climb into a car, we are required by law to strap them in.

Yet every day, thousands and thousands of children head off to Colorado schools in buses without seatbelts. Given that, how can we expect them to do the right thing when they are old enough to start climbing into vehicles without parental supervision?

We encourage the Legislature to pass Senate Bill 29. When our children's safety is at stake, it's not the time to be pinching pennies and praying disaster will never strike.

**Michele**

**From:** Michele [micheleco7@comcast.net]

**Sent:** Wednesday, February 25, 2009 11:31 AM

**To:** micheleco7@comcast.net

I am so relieved this measure is finally going somewhere! In a few short years by two kids will start elementary school and the thought of them riding a school bus is a frightening prospect for me. My best friend Sara and I were sitting right behind Kevin that June day in 1989, so I know firsthand just how differently that day would have ended had there been 3 point seatbelts on that bus. Rose, I am in awe of the strength you show by supporting other parents who've experienced the tragic loss of a child. I still think about your son and "Redemption Song" never fails to tear me up. Kevin was a good kid, and a kind person. The world still misses him, but Kevin is certainly not forgotten. -Marisa Burns Shrider  
Longmont 2/20/2009 5:26:17 PM

**Liane “Buffie” McFadyen**  
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*SB 09-029*  
*Education Committee*  
*03/19/2009 hearing*

### **ENDORSEMENTS**

American Academy of Pediatrics  
Colorado Sheriff's Department  
Safe Kids  
Teamsters  
American Medical Association  
American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons  
American College of Preventative Medicine  
Physicians for Automotive Safety  
Center for Automotive Safety  
National Coalition for School Bus Safety (NCSBS)  
National PTA

### **BILL**

*SB 09-029 does:*

- Require all NEW school buses purchased after June 30, 2010 to come equipped with federally approved lap-shoulder belts.
- Require all passengers to wear lap-shoulder belts when travelling on Colorado school bus.
- Require the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and its licensed school bus drivers to enforce seat belt usage on school buses.

### **MYTH BUSTERS**

**Compartmentalization Works:** According to the NTSB (1999 Crashworthiness paper) “compartmentalization is incomplete” in side impact and rollover crashes. The NTSB (1990) and the NHTSA (Federal Registry 2002) agree that lap-shoulder seat belts, along with compartmentalization, are the “Optimum protection” for passengers on a school bus.

**Usage:** Education is key. Just like getting kids to buckle up in their cars, mandatory use with education on how to use the seat belts is what makes compliance habitual.

**Behavior:** New Jersey, North Carolina, New York and other leading states using school bus seat belts say that behavior has changed dramatically. They have found that with students wearing seat belts on school buses;

Students stay seated.

Students do not hang in the aisle.

Students do not change seats.

Students are not distracting the driver by misbehaving.

**Size Matters:** seatbelts on school buses are retractable and adjustable for children from Kindergarten through adult size.

**Capacity:** School bus seat belt companies are making retractable/adjustable seat belts for 2-3 passengers on a bus seat belt. Capacity is NOT lost.

**Seat belts as weapons:** These are retractable lap-shoulder belts unlike lap belts with heavy metal buckles.

**Getting Out:** In order for any passenger to exit a motor vehicle after an accident they need to be conscious and free from injury. The same is true for passengers on a school bus. If you are injured or unconscious, how will you get out? If you are protected by a seat belt you can unbuckle and evacuate.

**Local Movement:** Over 200 school districts nationwide are putting seatbelts on their school buses voluntarily.

6 states have legislation requiring seat belts on school buses: California, Louisiana, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Texas

3 states have pending legislation: Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado