

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: SB 498 - "Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to SB 498, "Motor Vehicles - School Buses - Seat Belts." Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change-causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first in the national School Climate Change Action Plan.

In our work developing a Climate Change Action Plan for PGCPS, we found that having safety belts was an important step to encourage some parents who have access to bus service to allow their kids to ride the bus instead of driving children to school. The report states specifically:

Reliable, on-time and safe bus transportation performance is the single most important tool to increase ridership. The survey conducted by the CCAP Focus Work Group provided some insights into the thoughts of students in particular into the state of the buses. Some of these suggestions appear to come in at a reasonable cost and can be easily implemented and other suggestions are already being implemented by PGCPS.

Additionally, information is crucial to both parents and students in order to encourage increased bus riding. Students and parents/caregivers need to be aware of the safety features and amenities as they become available through active communication. Parents/caregivers need to be able to have accurate information as to when pick-ups and drop-offs will occur.

In order to keep bus ridership high so as to avoid parents taking single vehicle trips to schools, PGCPS must make sure the school population at large has access to safe buses with a positive experience and the knowledge that this is the best option.¹

This past year there was a school bus that rolled over in Howard County with injuries (February 2024), a crash with injuries in St Mary's County (April 2024), a school bus crash in Prince George's (October 2024) a school bus crash in Charles County (November 2024), a crash in Carroll County with injuries (December 2024), and those are just crashes that were noteworthy enough to make the local news. I know firsthand that my children's bus was also involved in a minor crash last year, and there are likely countless more. Thankfully, none of these turned tragic, but safety belts will definitely help reduce injuries in the worst crashes and also provide parents with more certainty as to their children's safety on school buses.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eS5YuvflbLyDsnw5QWwqITtKBeEjx28/view>