

Jesse White announces support for requiring seat belts on school buses

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Teams with Rep. Lou Lang and Sen. Martin Sandoval on legislation supported by NHTSA

SPRINGFIELD - Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White is teaming with longtime advocate of school bus seat belts, Deputy Majority Leader Rep. Lou Lang (D-Skokie), as well as Transportation Committee Chairman Sen. Martin Sandoval (D-Cicero) by introducing legislation requiring 3-point seat belts on school buses. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) supports 3-point seat belts in school buses.

“Nothing is more important than the lives and safety of our children,” said White. “I served with Rep. Lang in the House and appreciate his commitment to this issue over the years. With improvements in the technology of seat belts, along with NHTSA’s recommendation, now is the time to pass legislation pushing for a significant change in protecting our children on school buses.”

In late 2015, NHTSA endorsed seat belts on school buses due in large part to improved technology with 3-point safety belts. Up until NHTSA’s endorsement, federal and state safety organizations have largely remained neutral on the issue, with expressed concerns on whether 2-point lap seat belts improved the overall safety of a child riding a school bus. However, 3-point safety belts better protect children due to their ability to diffuse the forceful and sudden movement the body sustains during a crash over the chest, waist and shoulder areas.

“While school buses are a safe form of transportation, there is no amount of safety which could ever be enough to protect our children,” Lang said. “It is time to provide that safety by making sure that kids have seatbelts on their way to and from school just as if a parent was driving them.”

Six states — California, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Louisiana and Texas — have passed laws requiring seat belts in school buses.

Illinois is a national leader in school bus safety. In order to drive a school bus in Illinois, a person must obtain a special school bus permit, which is more involved than obtaining a typical CDL. To obtain the school bus permit, an applicant must possess a valid driver’s license that has not been revoked or suspended for at least three years prior to application. In addition, they must pass written and road school bus driver permit exams and must submit to and pass an Illinois-specific FBI criminal background check. The school bus permit must be renewed each year and requires an annual refresher classroom training course. The applicant must pass an annual physical examination, which includes drug testing.

“My mission is to make Illinois roads the safest ever,” said White. “This new legislation will help us accomplish this goal.”