

Duckworth & Cohen Re-introduce Legislation To Improve School Bus Safety Ahead Of Students Going Back To School

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As students across Illinois prepare to return to school for the beginning of the new school year, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a member of the U.S. Commerce, Science and Transportation (CST) Committee, and Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN-09) re-introduced the *School Bus Safety Act* to help keep students safe as they travel to and from school while also helping prevent accidents involving school buses.

Their legislation would implement safety recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board to make school buses safer by ensuring there are seat belts at every seat and buses are equipped with safety measures like stability control and automatic braking systems. The bill would also create a grant program to help school districts modify school buses to meet these important safety modifications.

“No parent should have to worry about the safety of their children when they get on a school bus, but school buses often lack seat belts and other basic safety equipment that every parent demands,” Duckworth said. “Nothing is more important than protecting our children, which is why I’m proud to be re-introducing the *School Bus Safety Act* with Rep. Cohen to help prevent accidents, make accidents less severe and implement other commonsense safety recommendations that will save lives.”

"The National Transportation Safety Board has made it clear that seatbelts on school buses would save lives," Cohen said. "The measures in the School Bus Safety Act are needed to ensure the precious children carried in school buses reach their schools and get back home safely. This bill is commonsense safety legislation and long overdue reform."

The *School Bus Safety Act* would require the Department of Transportation issue rules requiring all school buses include:

- A **3-point safety belt**, which includes a seat belt across a lap as well as a shoulder harness to help protect passengers by restraining them in case of a collision.
- An **Automatic Emergency Braking System**, which helps prevent accidents and crashes by detecting objects or vehicles ahead of the bus and braking automatically.
- An **Event Data Recorder (EDR)** that can record pre- and post-crash data, driver inputs, and restraint usage and when a collision does occur.
- An **Electronic Stability Control (ESC) System** that will use automatic computer-controlled braking of individual wheels to assist the driver remain in control of the vehicle.
- A **Fire Suppression System**, which addresses engine fires.
- A **Firewall** that prohibits hazardous quantities of gas or flame to pass through the firewall from the engine compartment to the passenger compartment.

“Tens of millions of our precious young people ride in school busses every day. There is no reason why they shouldn’t be protected with properly designed seat belts, emergency braking devices and electronic stability control. These are all readily available safety technologies and not requiring them in school buses, is a tragic oversight,” stated Jack

Gillis, Executive Director of Consumer Federation of America. “CFA appreciates the efforts of Senator Duckworth to protect our nation’s most valuable resource, our young people, with the School Bus Safety Act.”

“The National Safety Council is proud to stand with Senator Duckworth to support the School Bus Safety Act. Simple safety measures that we take for granted, like seat belts, are often left out of school buses, placing our youngest riders at risk,” said Mark Chung, Vice President of Roadway Safety. “Now is the time to ensure our school buses include all the safety features we expect in *all* our vehicles today.”

“This fall many students will be returning to rides on school buses for the first time since the start of the pandemic,” Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) President Cathy Chase said. “While much of the focus rightly has been on ensuring their safety at school, it is also essential to better protect them during their commutes. School buses are not required to be equipped with basic protections such as seat belts, automatic emergency braking (AEB), and electronic stability control (ESC). Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) has taken action to correct these safety shortfalls by introducing the School Bus Safety Act, which includes these and other upgrades recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). We urge Congress to pass this lifesaving legislation to make students’ school bus trips safer.”

[According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#) 1,207 people have died in school transportation-related crashes between 2009 and 2018, which is an average of 121 people each year. That includes a pair of tragic school bus accidents in 2016 that took place in [Baltimore, Maryland](#) and [Chattanooga, Tennessee](#), both of which resulted in six fatalities. Overall, in the 10-year period from 2009 to 2018, there were 1,083 school-transportation-related crashes, half of which occurred in rural areas. NBC’s Today Show [highlighted](#) the issue in a 2019 segment where Senator Duckworth was interviewed about her efforts to push forward the *School Bus Safety Act* in Congress.

In 2019, Duckworth [spoke](#) about this issue at the 51st annual National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) conference in Washington, D.C. Duckworth also [highlighted](#) her school bus safety legislation at Little Village Academy in Chicago in 2019 and during a [virtual meeting](#) with then Transportation Secretary nominee Pete Buttigieg in January of this year.

The School Bus Safety Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety; National Safety Council; Consumer Federation of America; and Center for Auto Safety, American Academy of Pediatrics and Kids and Car Safety.