

Commission on Local Government

Estimate of Local Fiscal Impact
2004 General Assembly Session

Bill: HB 927

Patron: Fralin

Date: January 28, 2004

In accordance with the provisions of §§ 30–19.03 through 30–19.03:1.1 of the Code of Virginia, the staff of the Commission on Local Government offers the following analysis of the above-referenced bill:

I. Bill Summary

HB 927 requires school buses purchased by schools or school divisions after July 1, 2004, be equipped with safety belts or safety belts and shoulder harnesses of types approved by the Superintendent of State Police. By July 1, 2009, all school buses would be required to have safety belts or safety belts and shoulder harnesses. Local school divisions would also have to comply with Board of Education regulations to ensure that all passengers, including the driver, wear the belts or harnesses or both whenever the bus is in motion.

II. Fiscal Impact Analysis

In January of 2000, the State Department of Education (DOE) reported that Virginia's school divisions at that time owned 13,581 school buses, with only about 354 of those vehicles equipped with safety restraint belts/harnesses pursuant to federal law. At that time, DOE also reported that since school divisions purchased approximately 800 school buses each year, the preponderance of local buses would have to retrofitted in order to ensure all such vehicles would be equipped with seat belts/harnesses. Further, DOE obtained dealer quotes indicating that in 2000, the inclusion of seat belts/harnesses on new buses would add approximately \$1,200-\$1,440 to the cost of each bus, and that retrofitting of existing buses with safety restraint instruments would cost approximately \$1,000-\$1,100 per bus.

The Commission on Local Government received fiscal impact estimates concerning HB 927 from the Cities of Chesapeake, Lynchburg, and Martinsville and from the Counties of Bath, Gloucester, James City, Northampton, Rappahannock, Rockingham, and Spotsylvania. Gloucester County reported that it is currently in compliance with the requirement of this bill. In addition, James City County could not determine the fiscal impact of HB 927 since it is a member of a regional school division, and the cost of the requirement of the legislation would be shared among the participating localities. The estimates of additional expenditures of \$5,000 or more are as follows:

County of Bath**\$25,000 Total Cost**

The County's estimate is based upon an additional cost of \$2,000 per school bus for seat belts/harnesses, and the purchase of two buses per year until July 1, 2009.

City of Chesapeake**\$3,815,000 Total Cost**

The total cost is based upon an estimate of \$105,000 to add seat belts to 70 buses which are seat-belt ready and \$3,710,000 to retrofit 371 buses that are not seat-belt ready.

City of Martinsville**\$150,000 Total Cost**

The City of Martinsville's estimate is based upon a retrofitting cost of \$6,000 per bus for the 25 buses in its fleet since the City has no plans to purchase any school buses prior to 2009.

Northampton County**\$118,100 Total Cost**

Northampton County based its estimate upon the cost to retrofit 47 school buses at a cost of \$2,500 per bus, and an additional yearly cost of \$600 to maintain the seat belts due to regular wear and tear and vandalism.

Rappahannock County**\$28,380 Total Cost**

The total cost was based upon retrofitting 22 school buses at a cost of \$20 per seat per bus.

Rockingham County**\$80,000 Total Cost**

The County based its estimate on the purchase of approximately ten new school buses per year at an additional cost of \$1,100 per bus for seat belts and approximately \$25,000 needed in 2009 to retrofit buses not equipped with seat belts.

Although the City of Lynchburg did not furnish a total cost of the impact of HB 927, the City indicated that the seat belt requirement would add approximately \$6,000 to the cost of a school bus. Spotsylvania County noted that since the full implementation of the bill would not be until 2009, the County could not determine the fiscal impact of the proposed legislation. However, the County reported that while it is currently purchasing school buses where seat belts can be easily installed, the number of older buses remaining in its fleet by 2009 that would require retrofitting for seat belts is unknown at this time. The City of Chesapeake advised that its fiscal impact estimate did not include the cost of lost bus seating for elementary school children since the addition of seat belts would reduce the capacity in each bus by almost 25%. That reduction in bus capacity would require Chesapeake to purchase approximately 100 additional buses at a cost of \$75,000 each, plus the cost of additional drivers. Finally, several

localities reported that ensuring that students were properly belted in a seat would add to travel times and that inappropriate use of seat belts may be harmful to younger children.

III. Conclusion

The fiscal impact of HB 927 on local school divisions will vary depending upon the size of their school bus fleets, the number of new school buses purchased each year, and the number of buses in 2009 that will need to be retrofitted for seat belts. While some pupil transportation costs are included in State funding for the Standards of Quality, any such additional funds would not be available until the 2006-2008 Biennium. Further, at the present time there is no State assistance for retrofitting school buses for seat belts. As noted above by the City of Chesapeake, the implementation of HB 927 could result in substantial costs to some localities.