The Anne Arundel County Board of Education OPPOSES House Bill 940 - Education - School Vehicles Used by Private Entities - Seat Belt Requirement. This bill requires that every school vehicle that is used by a private, nongovernmental entity under a contract with a local school system to transport students to school must be equipped with seat belts. A person may not operate a school vehicle for a private, nongovernmental entity under contract with a local school system to transport students unless the person and each occupant under age 16 are restrained by a seat belt. A violator of this provision is subject to a fine of not more than $50. “Seat belt” is defined as any belt, strap, harness, or like device.

Local boards of education are responsible for funding transportation provided to students within their school systems. Those responsibilities have significantly expanded due to additional costs associated with the transporting of special education and homeless students. Operational expenses associated with fuel costs and labor shortages have also contributed to this increased cost. Although the State provides some funding for transportation, those dollars do not increase enough from year to year to cover increasing enrollments and increasing costs of obtaining and maintaining school buses.

House Bill 940 proposes a new unfunded safety mandate. Anne Arundel County Public Schools follows federal standards concerning school bus safety, and the inclusion of seatbelts on school buses is not a federal requirement. School bus safety involves a wide array of activities such as bus driver training, providing safe bus stops, maximizing student safety through the use of security cameras on buses, enforcing traffic laws for reckless drivers who illegally pass buses, and the design and construction standards of the buses themselves. In these ways local school systems, bus contractors, and local law enforcement agencies work to ensure the safest possible transport of students to and from school. We believe that legislative efforts should, instead, focus on securing adequate funding to enable local school systems to ensure maximum student safety according to industry standards.

Accordingly, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education respectfully urges an UNFAVORABLE committee report on House Bill 940.