

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY

GOVERNOR MURPHY SIGNS SCHOOL SEAT BELT LEGISLATION TO SAFEGUARD STUDENTS

PARAMUS – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation requiring certain school buses to be equipped with lap and shoulder seat belts. The Governor signed the bill, A-4110, in response to the Paramus East Brook Middle School bus crash which killed a teacher and a student in May.

On Thursday May 17, 2018, a school bus carrying 38 students and seven adults from the Paramus School District collided with a dump truck on Route 80 in Morris County. Teacher Jennifer Williamson, who taught at East Brook for more than 20 years, and 10-year old student Miranda Vargas died in the crash.

“We will never know if a three-point belt would have saved the lives of Miranda Vargas and Jennifer Williamson, or whether they would have prevented serious injury to so many others on May 17,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Every child and every educator and adult chaperone deserves our best effort to protect their safety and the best possible chance of emerging unharmed in the unfortunate event of a school bus accident. For Miranda and Mrs. Williamson and for all the children in New Jersey and for their families and communities, I am honored to sign this legislation.”

A-4110, which modifies existing law, P.L.1992, c.92., requires school buses to have a three-point lap and shoulder seat belt or other child restraint system for each seat on the bus in conformity with federal standards.

The legislation takes effect immediately and applies to school buses manufactured on or after 180 days of the Governor’s signature.

“We know that lap belts are not enough to keep kids safe in a school bus crash,” **Senator Sam Thompson said**. “That’s why I’ve worked hard over the past five years to have New Jersey’s school buses equipped with three-point seat belts. I’m glad that Governor Murphy has signed this measure into law.”

“Today, the State of New Jersey will lead by example in requiring by law the use of three-point seat belt systems on school buses. Our children should have the best protection possible on school buses in case of an accident,” **said Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez**. “We use a three-point lap safety belt in our vehicles to safely secure ourselves and our children while driving. A school bus must have the same level of protection for our children going to and from school. With the signing of this bill into law, we strengthen bus requirements and improve the safety of our student bus riders.”

“Following the bus accident that tragically took the lives of a Paramus student and teacher, I called for legislative hearings to improve safety. We heard moving testimony from a family friend of mine that survived the crash. He wondered why school buses didn’t have the same kind of seatbelts as his parents’ car that came with over the shoulder seatbelts,” **said Senator Joseph Lagana**. “With the signing of this bill into law, we are ensuring our children will be protected the way they deserve.”

“The May bus crash was a tragic reminder of how vulnerable our students are while riding on school buses. Cars are equipped with seat belts and for good reason. They can prevent fatalities and minimize injuries,” **said Assemblywoman Lisa Swain**. “I’m happy that this bill, one of my very first as a representative of this community, is now law and will help keep our students safe by requiring three-point lap and shoulder seat belts in all school buses.”

“Seat belts save lives. Equipping school buses with three-point lap and shoulder safety harnesses can help make all the difference in the event of an accident,” **said Assemblyman Chris Tully**. “As a father, I know that what occurred this past May is every parent’s worst nightmare. The fight for student safety reforms is not over, but I hope parents can rest a little easier knowing their children are riding more securely now.”

Sponsors of the legislation include: Assembly members Yvonne Lopez, Daniel R. Benson, Lisa Swain and Christopher Tully as well as Senators Samuel D. Thompson, Shirley K. Turner and Joseph A. Lagana.

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