



The National Coalition for School Bus Safety

June 21, 2010

Honorable Raymond LaHood, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

This past Wednesday, Chesapeake, Virginia school bus # 644 ran off a shoulder less road, dropped into a ditch and rolled over onto its left side.

According to the *Hampton RoadsPilot/Online.com*, passenger and eighth grader Chuma Awannce described what happened next:

Chuma said he was sitting on the right side of the bus toward the front, paging through a girl's yearbook, when he felt the bus swerve.

"Next, we're sitting up like this," he said, holding his right hand higher than his left. "And next I hear the bus driver say, 'Oh, shoot!' "

Then, suddenly, Chuma was airborne.

His head bumped the roof and he found himself atop a pile of students. Some were screaming, he said, including a friend who was hollering for someone to get off of him.

School bus # 664 had no seat belts.

For decades the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has insisted that during school bus crashes occupants are safety "compartmentalized" between high-back, well padded and anchored seats, persistently ignoring the well established fact that the seat provides no protection for children during side impact and roll over accidents.

Since school bus lap/shoulder belts are currently a production line product, when the school bus seating standard was recently revised, we urged NHTSA to require lap/shoulder belts be installed for every seating position in all newly manufactured school buses.

Disappointingly NHTSA failed again in issuing a revised rule on October 1, 2008. Their revision calls for belts, but only in the small buses (under 10,000 lbs GVW) ignoring the need for restraints in the higher capacity, much more numerous, familiar, large, yellow school buses. Since the big buses provide 98.5% of the seats per year, as an improvement in passenger protection, the Standard revision is essentially meaningless.

As a result, on March 10, The National Coalition for School Bus Safety, and 15 other major safety, medical, public interest and parents groups listed in Attachment A as well as several interested individuals petitioned NHTSA (Docket ID # NHTSA-2010-0007) strongly urging the inclusion of lap/shoulder belts on the larger vehicles (attached).

Within the past few week there have been many examples of why proper restraints on school buses are needed.

Date	Place	Circumstance	Consequence
May 21	NY City	Driver Braked Suddenly	20 to hospital
May 21	Detroit, MI	Head out of window hit tree If belted could not happen	Fatal
May 26	Kilgore, TX	Collision with truck, overturn	All belted, no injuries
June 1	Epping, NH	Bus single vehicle rollover	Only one passenger
June 2	Zanesville, OH	Bus single vehicle roll over	One fatal, 6 injuries one serious
June 4	Garden State Pkwy.	Single vehicle rollover	No children aboard
June 5	Oceanside, CA	Crash, roll over	6 Injured
June 16	Chesapeake, VA	Single vehicle roll over	Multiple injuries

Clearly, if restraints were present they would have prevented the fatalities and mitigated injuries. Parents have the right to ask, “We always wear our set belts and insist on our children buckling up. In the school bus why isn’t my child protected.”

Mr. Secretary, please use your good office to urge NHTSA’s acceptance of our petition and thereby move to fully protect the 25 million children who ride back and forth to school every school day.

Sincerely,

**Arthur L. Yeager
33 Park Gate Drive
Edison, NJ 08820**

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The National Coalition for School Bus Safety

Attachment A

NHTSA Petitioners – March 10, 2010

Alan Ross, Arthur L. Yeager
National Coalition for School Bus Safety

Clarence Ditlow
Center for Auto Safety

Stephanie Tombrello
SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.

Rosemary Shahan
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

James Kraemer
2safeschools.org

Ami Gadhia
Consumers Union

Deborah Stewart
Safe Ride News

David Arkush
Public Citizen

Janette Fennell
KidsandCars.org

Judith Stone
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Andrew McGuire
Trauma Foundation

Jack Gillis
Consumer Federation of America

Joseph D. Zuckerman, MD
President
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons

David C. Templeman, MD
President
Orthopaedic Trauma Association

Errol Alden, MD FAAP
Executive Director and CEO
American Academy of Pediatrics

Pat Harris
Belt Up School Kids

David and Mary-Lynn Cullen
Advocacy Institute for Children

Ruth Spaulding
Guilford Co. NC School Bus Safety
Parent Group

Stephen A. Langford
Coalition for Child Safety

Nancy Bauder
Former Executive Director
Kansans for Highway Safety

Lynn Brown, Rhea Vogel
Clarkstown Council of PTA's
Seat Belt Usage Committee

Norm Cherkis