

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

S.B. 546  
By: Menéndez  
Transportation  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

In March 2024, a fatal motor vehicle accident involving a Hays CISD school bus and concrete pump truck resulted in the deaths of Ulises Rodriguez Montoya, a pre-K student on the school bus, and Ryan Wallace, a doctoral student at The University of Texas, prompting an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board. The bill sponsor has informed the committee that in the advent of this tragedy, it is important for Texas to consider ways in which students can be protected when they are being transported to and from school. Under current statute, Texas only requires that school buses be equipped with seat belts if they are model year 2018 or later, and an exception exists for school districts that find that the cost of adopting seat belts falls outside of their budget. School bus crashes can be deadly, especially when passengers are not equipped with a seat belt. S.B. 546 aims to protect our schoolchildren by eliminating the exception to current seat belt requirements for buses that are model year 2017 and earlier. The bill requires school districts for which the seat belt requirement is infeasible to report the costs of compliance to the Texas Education Agency, which is subsequently required to report its finding to the legislature.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

### **ANALYSIS**

S.B. 546 amends the Transportation Code to revise the exceptions to the requirement for a school bus, school activity bus, multifunction school activity bus, or school-chartered bus operated by or contracted for use by a public school district for the transportation of schoolchildren to be equipped with a three-point seat belt for each passenger, including the operator, as follows:

- removes the exception for a bus purchased by a district that is a model year 2017 or earlier;
- replaces the exception for a bus purchased by a district that is a model year 2018 or later, if the district's board of trustees determines that the district's budget does not permit the district to purchase a bus that is equipped with the required three-point seat belts and votes to approve that determination in a public meeting, with an exception for a bus operated by or contracted for use by a school district if the district's board of trustees determines that the district's budget does not permit the district to purchase a bus that is equipped with the required three-point seat belts; and
- includes an exception for a bus for which the warranty would become void if the bus were equipped to comply with the three-point seatbelt requirement.

The bill establishes that a district is not required to comply with these provisions before September 1, 2029.

S.B. 546 requires a school district's board of trustees that makes a determination that the district's budget does not permit the district to purchase a bus that is equipped with the required three-point seat belts, not later than the end of the 2025-2026 school year, to submit to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and present in a public meeting of the board a report that includes the following information:

- the number of buses operated by or contracted for use by the district that are not equipped with seat belts, that are equipped with two-point seat belts, and that are equipped with three-point seat belts; and
- the estimated cost to the district to equip with three-point seat belts each bus operated by or contracted for use by the district that is not equipped with those seat belts as required.

The bill requires TEA, not later than January 1, 2027, to do the following:

- collect the information submitted under such reports;
- calculate the total amount of financial assistance needed for all districts to come into full compliance with the three-point seat belt requirement; and
- summarize and make available to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and each member of the legislature the information regarding the reports and the total amount of necessary financial assistance.

The bill establishes that these provisions relating to reporting requirements for an applicable board of trustees and TEA expire January 1, 2028.

S.B. 546 authorizes a school district to accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source to implement the three-point seat belt requirement.

#### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2025.