

**STORAGE NAME:** h0561

**DATE:** January 31, 2000

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION  
ANALYSIS**

**BILL #:** HB 561

**RELATING TO:** Florida Safety Belt Law

**SPONSOR(S):** Representative Cantens

**TIED BILL(S):**

**ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:**

- (1) TRANSPORTATION
  - (2) LAW ENFORCEMENT & CRIME PREVENTION
  - (3) JUDICIARY
  - (4) CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROPRIATIONS
  - (5)
- 

**I. SUMMARY:**

Current law requires a motor vehicle operator, front seat passengers, and all passengers under 16 years of age to wear seat belts. The "Florida Safety Belt Law" is enforced as a secondary offense; that is, law enforcement officers cannot stop motorists solely for not using their seat belts. Instead, the officer must first stop the motorist for a suspected violation of state traffic, motor vehicle, or driver license laws before the officer can issue a uniform traffic citation for failure to wear a seat belt.

The bill amends the "Florida Safety Belt Law" to provide for primary enforcement of the seat belt law. Under this bill, law enforcement officers would be authorized to stop motorists and issue citations when an operator, front seat passenger, or a passenger under 16 years of age is not using a seat belt. A person who violates this provision would be cited for a nonmoving violation, punishable by a fine of \$30.

Furthermore, current law provides that the number of passengers in a pick-up truck may not exceed the number of seat belts installed by the manufacturer. The bill amends this paragraph by broadening the limitation of pick-up trucks to *all* motor vehicles.

The bill, however, prohibits a law enforcement officer from searching or inspecting the vehicle, its contents, or the driver based solely upon this violation.

The bill has an effective date of July 1, 2000.

Although the number of safety belt violations as a primary violation may result in an increase of citations, the potential fiscal impacts are unknown.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. DOES THE BILL SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

1. Less Government Yes  No  N/A

Law enforcement would be required to stop motor vehicles for a violation of the Florida Safety Belt Law as a primary, rather than a secondary, violation.

2. Lower Taxes Yes  No  N/A

3. Individual Freedom Yes  No  N/A

4. Personal Responsibility Yes  No  N/A

5. Family Empowerment Yes  No  N/A

B. PRESENT SITUATION:

Section 316.614, F.S., the "Florida Safety Belt Law", requires a motor vehicle operator, front seat passengers, and all passengers under 16 years of age to wear seat belts. This section also provides that the number of passengers in a pick-up truck may not exceed the number of seat belts installed by the manufacturer. The "Florida Safety Belt Law" is enforced as a secondary offense; that is, law enforcement officers cannot stop motorists solely for not using their seat belts. Instead, the officer must first stop the motorist for a suspected violation of Chapters 316, 320, or 322, F.S., before the officer can issue a uniform traffic citation for failure to wear a seat belt.

Although the "Florida Safety Belt Law" is enforced as a secondary offense, the child restraint requirements of s. 316.613, F.S., are enforced as a primary offense. The law requires all children 5 years of age and younger being transported in a motor vehicle to be restrained in a carrier, integrated car seat, or seat belt. Motorists are subject to being stopped by a law enforcement officer for failure to comply with this requirement.

The penalty for failure to wear a seat belt is \$30, plus add-ons and court costs. Revenues collected from citations issued for seat belt violations are distributed like other citation revenues, pursuant to s. 318.21, F.S., except \$5 for each citation paid is directed to the Epilepsy Services Trust Fund.

There are, however, exceptions for when seat belts are required to be worn. For example, persons who deliver newspapers on home delivery routes are not required to wear seat belts during the course of their employment.

Currently, there is no language in the "Florida Safety Belt Law" statute which relates to searches and inspections of a motor vehicle, its contents, or the driver by a law enforcement officer for a traffic stop which results in a secondary violation of s. 316.614, F.S.

C. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

This bill amends the "Florida Safety Belt Law" to provide for primary enforcement of the seat belt law. Under this bill, law enforcement officers would be authorized to stop motorists and issue citations when an operator, front seat passenger, or a passenger under 16 years of age is not using a seat belt. Law enforcement officers would also be able to issue citations when the number of passengers in a motor vehicle exceeds the number of seat belts installed by the manufacturer.

The bill, however, prohibits a law enforcement officer from searching or inspecting the vehicle, its contents, or the driver based solely upon this violation.

D. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

III. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

N/A

2. Expenditures:

N/A

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

N/A

2. Expenditures:

N/A

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

N/A

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Although the number of safety belt violations as a primary violation may result in an increase of citations, the potential fiscal impacts are unknown.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

N/A

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

N/A

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

N/A

V. COMMENTS:

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

N/A

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

N/A

C. OTHER COMMENTS:

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the average seat belt use rate in 1998 in the eleven states which have laws that permit primary enforcement is 17 percentage points higher than the average of those states which permit only secondary enforcement. The average use rate among primary law enforcement states in 1998 was 79 percent and the average use rate among secondary law enforcement states in 1998 was 62 percent. Furthermore, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that in 1998 the average seat belt use rate in Florida was 57 percent.

According to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, this bill would strengthen Florida's Safety Belt Law by increasing compliance and, thereby reducing the number of deaths and injuries associated with failure to wear a seat belt. DHS&MV's records indicate that 270,717 citations were issued in Florida for seat belt violations during calendar year 1998.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

N/A

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VII. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION:

Prepared by:

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