

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Provide limited government—The bill expands the authority of law enforcement to detain motor vehicle operators, arguably increasing the scope of government rather than decreasing it. Details are provided in the discussion below.

Promote Personal Responsibility—Currently, a person over 18 years of age may not be stopped for a safety belt violation as a primary enforcement action by a law enforcement officer. To the extent that primary enforcement allows more effective enforcement of the safety belt law, the bill tends to increase personal accountability of drivers and passengers for failure to comply with the law.

Safeguard individual liberty—Although the bill does not impose any new regulation upon motor vehicle operators, it does authorize law enforcement officials to detain an individual operating a motor vehicle in circumstances that under current law would not be reasonable grounds for stopping the motorist. Details are provided in the discussion below.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

In 1986, the Legislature enacted the “Florida Safety Belt Law.” Section 316.614, F.S., requires a motor vehicle operator, front seat passengers, and all passengers less than 18 years of age to wear safety belts. The law is enforced against any adult driver or adult passenger who is not restrained by a safety belt. If a person under 18 years of age is unrestrained, the law is enforced against the driver. The “Florida Safety Belt Law” is enforced as a secondary offense; that is, law enforcement officers cannot stop motorists solely for not using their safety belts unless the operator or passengers are under 18. 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 safety belt. In 2005, HB 1697 was passed to amend s. 316.614, F.S., making it a primary offense to operate a motor vehicle in this state unless each passenger and the operator of the vehicle under the age of 18 years is restrained by a safety belt or by a child restraint device.

The penalty for failure to wear a safety belt is \$30, plus administrative and court costs. The fees and court costs vary from county to county, but the total paid for each citation would range from \$68.50 to \$89.50. Revenues collected from citations issued for safety belt violations are distributed like other traffic citation revenues, pursuant to s. 318.21, F.S., except that \$5 of each citation paid is directed to the Epilepsy Services Trust Fund. According to the Uniform Traffic Citation Statistics compiled by the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, there were 300,213 safety belt violations during the 2004 calendar year.

Those not subject to the safety belt law include:

- Persons certified by a physician as having a medical condition that would cause the use of a safety belt to be inappropriate or dangerous;
- Persons delivering newspapers on home delivery routes during the course of their employment;
- Front seat passengers of a pickup truck in excess of the number of safety belts installed;
- Employees of a solid waste or recyclable collection service on designated routes during the course of their employment;
- Persons occupying the living quarters of a recreational vehicle or the space within the body of a truck used for the storage of merchandise.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) there are 22 primary states, 27 secondary states, and 1 state (New Hampshire) that effectively has no belt use law. The National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) is an observational survey of safety belt use that began in 1994 and has been used by NHTSA to measure the nation's safety belt use. NOPUS has consistently found higher usage rates in the presence of primary laws, with collective statistically different rates of 83 percent in primary states compared to 75 percent in secondary ones in 2003. Through statewide enforcement/education efforts such as the Buckle Up Florida/Click It or Ticket campaign, Florida has shown an overall increase in seat belt usage rates from 59 percent in 1999 to 76.3 percent in 2004. As of January 23, 2006 Florida's safety belt usage rate was 73.9 percent. Research has found that lap/shoulder belts, when used properly, reduce the risk of fatal injury to front seat passenger car occupants by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50 percent (for occupants of light trucks, 60 percent and 65 percent, respectively).

The SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act) is the current federal transportation act and includes a federal grant program¹ that encourages states to raise safety belt usage. In order to qualify for this program, a state must enact a primary safety belt law, or achieve 85 percent safety belt usage for 2 consecutive years.

Effect of Proposed Changes

HB 97 gives the act the popular name the "Dori Slosberg Safety Belt Law" and amends the Florida Safety Belt Law to provide for primary enforcement for all drivers. A law enforcement officer would be authorized to stop a motorist and issue a citation for a safety belt violation upon reasonable suspicion that the driver, any passenger under the age of 18 years, or any passenger in the front seat who is 18 years of age or older, is not restrained. A person violating this provision would be cited for a nonmoving violation, punishable by a \$30 fine plus applicable fees and court costs. The fees and court costs vary from county to county, but the total paid for each citation would range from \$68.50 to \$89.50.

If Florida enacted a primary safety belt enforcement law, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) studies forecast that 192 lives would be saved, 2,792 serious injuries would be prevented, and over \$589 million in economic costs would be saved annually. Also, if Florida enacts a primary safety belt law, it will be eligible to receive a one-time grant of \$35.5 million from the SAFETEA-LU safety belt incentive program.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Gives the act the popular name the "Dori Slosberg Safety Belt Law."

Section 2. Amends s. 316.614, F.S., to provide for primary enforcement of the safety belt law.

Section 3. Provides that the act shall take effect October 1, 2006.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

See FISCAL COMMENTS section.

2. Expenditures:

See FISCAL COMMENTS section.

¹ 23 U.S.C. 406.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

See FISCAL COMMENTS section.

2. Expenditures:

See FISCAL COMMENTS section.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

See FISCAL COMMENTS section.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Enforcement Impacts

Primary enforcement of some safety belt violations may result in the issuance of an increased number of citations, and the assessment of additional traffic penalties and court costs. However, because it is impossible to forecast how many additional violations will occur and be cited, the fiscal impact on state and local government is unknown.

Safety Impacts

To the extent that the bill increases safety belt usage in Florida, crash-related injuries and deaths could be reduced thereby decreasing associated medical and insurance costs. NHTSA studies forecast that 192 lives would be saved, 2,792 serious injuries would be prevented, and over \$589 million in economic costs would be saved annually, if a primary safety belt enforcement law were enacted.

Federal Funds Issues

Section 157 in Title 23, of the United States Code as established by the previous federal transportation act authorized incentive funds for Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 1999 through 2003. These incentive funds were awarded annually to states whose seat belt use rates for a given year either exceeded the national average or exceeded the state's highest achieved seat belt usage rate during certain designated previous years.

Through statewide enforcement/education efforts under the Buckle Up Florida/Click It or Ticket campaign, administered by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Safety Office, Florida had an overall increase in seat belt usage rates from 59 percent in 1999 to 76.3 percent in 2004. This enabled the state to receive Section 157 incentive funds in FFY 2002 (\$1,255,600) and FFY 2003 (\$2,863,600). FDOT has used these funds for enhancing the Buckle Up Florida/Click It or Ticket Campaign to help insure continued seat belt usage increases.

The SAFETEA-LU is the current federal transportation act and includes a federal grant program² that encourages states to raise safety belt usage. In order to qualify for this program, a state must enact a primary safety belt law, or achieve 85 percent safety belt usage for 2 consecutive years. As of January 23, 2006 Florida's safety belt usage rate was 73.9 percent. This is a decline from 76.3 percent in 2004. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation,³ if Florida enacts a primary safety belt law it will be eligible to receive a one-time federal grant of \$35.5 million from the safety belt incentive program contained in SAFETEA-LU with no

² 23 U.S.C. 406.

³ Letter from Ms. Jacqueline Glassman, Acting Administrator, NHTSA, dated January 23, 2006, on file with House Transportation Committee.

requirement for a state match. The grant funds could be used for any highway safety related purpose including highway safety infrastructure improvements.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable because this bill does not appear to: require counties or cities to spend funds or take action requiring the expenditure of funds; reduce the authority that cities or counties have to raise revenues in the aggregate; or reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with cities or counties.

2. Other:

None

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

HB 97 does not require any grant or exercise of rule-making authority to implement its provisions.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE & COMBINED BILL CHANGES