



Senators Feinstein and Snowe Introduce Legislation to Require Seatbelts in Vehicles Transporting Migrant Workers

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Washington, DC – With hundreds of agriculture workers dying or being injured in transportation accidents each year, U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) today introduced legislation to provide safety regulations for vehicles used to transport migrant workers to and from their daily jobs.

“Today, many migrant workers travel to their jobs in dangerous and unsafe conditions, and a lack of adequate safety regulations results in the death or injury of hundreds of workers every year,” Senator Feinstein said. **“We must put an end to the all-too-common practice of forcing migrant workers to ride in overcrowded vans and trucks while sitting on benches and buckets with no access to seatbelts.”**

“With Maine’s agricultural economy heavily dependant on migrant workers, now is the time that we ensure that their safety is secured. I took steps to prevent the misuse of these vans in last year’s Surface Transportation Bill, and I am proud to continue that effort with Sen. Feinstein today by introducing legislation that puts a stop to the hundreds of deaths and injuries of migrant workers that take place each year because of the inhuman practice of overcrowding by requiring seat belts for all passengers,” said Senator Snowe.

The Farm and Forestry Worker Transportation Safety Act would:

- Require a designated seat and operational seatbelt for each passenger riding in a vehicle used to transport migrant agricultural and forest workers to and from their jobs;
- Require the Department of Transportation to issue seat and seatbelt minimum performance standards for vehicles that have been converted to transport migrant workers; and
- Provide a seven-year transition period for converted vehicles to make the necessary improvements to meet the same safety standards of new vehicles.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 78 agricultural workers lost their lives in transportation accidents in 2004 and an additional 440 were injured.

Fatal accidents in California and Maine have resulted from the lack of adequate safety regulations protecting migrant workers. In August 1999, 13 tomato field workers were killed when their van slammed into a tractor-trailer in Fresno County, California. Most of the victims were riding on three benches in the back of the van.

And in the worst motor vehicle accident in Maine's history, 14 forestry workers were killed in 2002 when their van flipped off a one-lane bridge over the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

However, Senators Feinstein and Snowe stressed that this issue does not just affect their home states, and is a problem that requires national attention.

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