



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



January 20, 2021

The Honorable Bill Landen, Senate Chair
The Honorable Donald Burkhart, Jr., House of Representatives Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation, Highways and Military Affairs
Wyoming State Legislature
213 State Capitol
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

Dear Chairman Landen and Chairman Burkhart:

As representatives of leading public health and safety organizations, we support passage of Senate File (SF) 11, legislation that will upgrade Wyoming's seat belt law to primary enforcement for all occupants. A comprehensive seat belt law is vital to overcome the public health epidemic of traffic fatalities and injuries and to ensure the health and safety of Wyoming families and visitors who travel on state roads.

In 2019, 147 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes in Wyoming, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). This amounts to a 32 percent increase over 2018 (111 people killed in traffic crashes). Lack of restraint use is a major contributing factor to traffic deaths and injury. Forty-seven percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed in 2019 in the U.S. were unrestrained, based on known use (NHTSA). Over the ten-year period of 2010 to 2019, motor vehicle crashes claimed the lives of nearly 1,300 people in Wyoming (NHTSA). Traffic crashes are a serious issue in urgent need of the effective solution provided by an all-occupant primary enforcement seat belt law.

Seat belts are proven lifesavers that protect the occupant in many common crash factors such as speeding, and impaired and distracted driving, but they are only effective when they are used properly. Seat belt use rates increase from 10 to 15 percentage points when primary laws are passed, as experienced in a number of states. A study conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) found that when states strengthen their laws from secondary to primary enforcement, driver death rates decline by an estimated seven percent. Unfortunately, even as seat belt use increased nationally in 2019, seat belt use dropped by eight percent in Wyoming to just over 78 percent, the third lowest seat belt use rate in the Nation (NHTSA).

In addition to saving lives and preventing lifelong debilitating injuries, seat belts save taxpayer dollars. Motor vehicle crashes cost Wyoming nearly \$790 million annually (NHTSA). Unbelted crash victims have medical bills that are 55 percent higher than belted victims, and society bears a majority of the cost through increased insurance premiums, taxes and health care costs (NHTSA). Upgrading Wyoming's seat belt law to primary enforcement for all occupants will send a strong message to drivers and passengers that everyone needs to buckle up on every trip.

On January 11, 2021, Advocates released its 2021 *Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws* (Roadmap Report); a copy follows this letter. While the goal of the Roadmap Report is to encourage states to enact proven laws to improve traffic safety, unfortunately, Wyoming has again received one of the lowest ratings, lacking 13 of 16 optimal laws, including primary enforcement seat belt laws for all occupants. At a time when our Nation is struggling with the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19, we ask you to advance this proven solution to protect road users and keep them out of overly-burdened emergency rooms and hospitals as well as curb the expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

Sincerely,

Wyoming Public Health Association

Victoria Ingerle, Child Injury Prevention Coordinator
Safe Kids Laramie County
Cheyenne Regional Medical Center

Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Janette Fennell, President and Founder
KidsAndCars.org

cc: Joint Committee on Transportation, Highways and Military Affairs Members

encl: *Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws*