



March 17, 2021

The Honorable Sherman Packard, Speaker
House of Representatives
General Court of New Hampshire
107 North Main Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Speaker Packard:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, law enforcement, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies working together to prevent motor vehicle crashes, save lives, reduce injuries and contain crash costs, urges you to support House Bill (HB) 251 to strengthen New Hampshire's child occupant protection statute. This measure requires that children remain rear facing in a child safety seat until age two or older. Children should remain in appropriate safety seats as long as possible, until they have outgrown the seat specifications. When children are properly restrained in a child safety seat that is suitable for their age and size, their chance of being killed or seriously injured in a car crash is greatly reduced.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for children in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)). On average, three children under age 14 were killed in traffic crashes each day in 2019 resulting in 1,053 fatalities, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). An additional 183,143 children were injured in crashes (NHTSA). Improperly restrained child passengers present a serious public health problem, yet it can be addressed with a proven solution. Across all age groups, injury risk is lowest (less than two percent) when children are placed in an age-appropriate restraint in the rear seat. Proper car seat use reduces fatal injury by 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers in passenger vehicles (NHTSA).

New Hampshire's current child passenger safety law requires children age six and younger and under 57 inches in height to use a child safety seat. Since the law was enacted, new research has been conducted and best practices in child passenger protection have been updated by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) calling for specifications related to stages of physical development from infancy through early childhood. According to the AAP, children younger than two years old are at an elevated risk of head and spine injuries in motor vehicle crashes because their heads are relatively large and their necks smaller with weak musculature. By supporting the entire torso, neck, head and pelvis, a rear facing car seat distributes crash forces over the entire body rather than focusing them only at belt contact points. When a child is placed in a rear facing car seat through age two or older, they are provided with optimal support for their head and neck in the event of a crash.

We urge you to advance HB 251, which reflects recommendations based on research and best practices, to improve child passenger safety in New Hampshire.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

cc: The Honorable Jason Osborn, House Majority Leader
The Honorable Renny Cushing, House Minority Leader