



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

February 22, 2022

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
The Honorable Dana Stein, Vice Chair
House Committee on Environment and Transportation
Maryland General Assembly
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Barve and Vice Chair Stein:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical, public health and law enforcement groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and curb costs, urges you to support Senate Bill (SB) 176, to strengthen Maryland's child occupant protection statute. This measure will ensure children remain rear facing in a child safety seat until age two or older or until they outgrow the specifications of the safety seat. When children are properly restrained in a child safety seat that is appropriate 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)). Maryland's current child passenger safety law requires children under age seven and less than 57 inches in height to use a child safety seat. Since that law was enacted, new research has been conducted and best practices in child passenger protection have been updated, calling for requirements that make further specifications related to stages of physical development from infancy through early childhood.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (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.

After a child reaches age two and the maximum height and weight limit for their rear facing safety seat, they may be turned forward facing in a harness-equipped child restraint. Use of the top tether and LATCH system, when available, is preferred. Children should remain in a forward facing harness and tether seat until they meet the height and weight limit of the restraint. Children who have outgrown the forward facing restraint may be placed in a booster seat, where they should remain until age eight and 57 inches in height as current law in Maryland specifies. All safety seats should be certified by the manufacturer to meet U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) safety standards. These recommendations are consistent with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the AAP and the CDC recommendations.

We urge you to support SB. 176 to better protect Maryland's vulnerable child passengers.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase
President