



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



August 12, 2022

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka, Senate President
The Honorable Bruce Tarr, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Ronald Mariano, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Bradley H. Jones, House Minority Leader
General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
24 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear President Spilka, Minority Leader Tarr, Speaker Mariano and Minority Leader Jones:

As leading safety organizations working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, deaths and injuries and contain costs, we urge you to support Senate Bill (S.) 1592/ House Bill (H.) 2446 to strengthen Massachusetts' child occupant protection statute. This measure will ensure children remain in a rear facing safety seat until age two or older and after they have outgrown the rear facing safety seat, require a forward facing harness equipped-safety seat until the child has outgrown it, based on the specifications. When children are properly restrained in a 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 among the leading causes of death for children ages one to 14 in the U.S.ⁱ In 2020, 1,093 children aged 14 and younger were killed, a three percent increase from 2019, representing three children killed each day on average. This included 276 children aged four through seven and 244 children aged three and younger.ⁱⁱ

Massachusetts' current child passenger safety law requires children aged seven and younger and less than 57 inches in height to use a safety seat. Since that law was enacted, new research has been conducted and best practices in child passenger protection have been updated to now call for requirements that take into account 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, as the bills would require. 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 the age eight and 57 inches in height as current

Massachusetts law specifies. These recommendations are consistent with those of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the AAP and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

We urge you to advance S. 1592/H. 2446 swiftly this session and better protect Massachusetts' vulnerable child passengers.

Sincerely,



Cathy Chase
President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety



Janette Fennell
Founder & President
Kids and Car Safety

-
- ⁱ 10 Leading Causes of Injury Deaths by Age Group Highlighting Unintentional Injury Deaths, United States – 2018 & 10 Leading Causes of Death by Age Group, United States – 2018, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/images/lc-charts/leading-causes-of-death-by-age-group-unintentional-2018-1100w850h.jpg> & <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/images/lc-charts/leading-causes-of-death-by-age-group-2018-1100w850h.jpg>.
- ⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts 2020 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2022, DOT HS 813 285, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813285>