



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



Kids and Car Safety
Love them ♥ Protect them

March 16, 2023

The Honorable Ileana Garcia, Chair
The Honorable Geraldine F. “Geri” Thompson, Vice Chair
Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs
Florida State Senate
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Chair Garcia and Vice Chair Thompson:

As representatives of leading public health and safety organizations working to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent deaths and injuries and contain crash costs, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) and Kids and Car Safety urge you to support Senate Bill (SB) 1374/ House Bill (HB) 1211, legislation that will strengthen Florida’s current child occupant protection law. This measure will ensure children through age two or older are restrained in a rear-facing safety seat, children ages three through four are restrained in a forward-facing or rear-facing safety seat with a five-point harness, and children ages five through seven are restrained in a booster seat with a safety belt or a forward-facing five-point harness. 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, the most recent year for which data is available, 1,093 children aged 14 and younger were killed as a result of traffic crashes.ⁱⁱ This is a three percent increase from 2019, when an average of three children lost their lives every day on our nation’s roads; 276 of these children were aged four through seven and 244 were aged three and younger.ⁱⁱⁱ

Florida’s current child passenger safety law only applies to children through the age of five and does not follow best practices in its requirements for specific safety seat usage. Since this law was enacted, research in child passenger protection has shown the need 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, they are provided with optimal support for their head and neck in the event of a crash.

After a child reaches age two and has outgrown a rear-facing safety seat, best practices dictate that a child may use a forward facing, harness-equipped child restraint as SB 1374/ HB 1211 would require. This legislation would also address children who have outgrown the forward-facing restraint and are age five or older; they may be placed in a booster seat secured by a seat belt. 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).

In 2020, 87 children (ages 0-14) in Florida died as a result of traffic crashes.^{iv} Only two states – California and Texas – recorded more crash-related child fatalities that year. Florida’s child fatality rate in traffic crashes is 2.47 (per 100,000 child population) and notably higher than the U.S average of 1.81.^v Yet, proven solutions are readily available. Use of appropriate child passenger safety seats is 47 percent effective in preventing fatalities

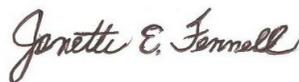
for ages 1-3 in all crashes, 43 percent effective in preventing fatalities for ages 3-5 in all crashes, and 67 percent effective in preventing serious to critical injuries for ages 5-8 in all crashes.^{vi}

Advocates and Kids and Car Safety urge you to advance SB 1374/ HB 1211, legislation that will better protect Florida's youngest and most vulnerable motor vehicle passengers.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety



Janette Fennell, Founder and President
Kids and Car Safety

cc: Members of the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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>

ⁱⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts 2020 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2022, DOT HS 813 285, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813285>

^{iv} Traffic Safety Facts 2020 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2022, DOT HS 813 285, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813285>

^v Traffic Safety Facts 2020 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2022, DOT HS 813 285, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813285>

^{vi} Evaluation of Child Restraint System Effectiveness, NHTSA, December 2020, DOT HS 813 047, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813047>.