



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



April 17, 2023

The Honorable Thomas Walsh, Chair
The Honorable Ted Gorski, Vice Chair
House Transportation Committee
New Hampshire General Court
107 North Main Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Chair Walsh and Vice Chair Gorski:

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 (SB) 118 to update New Hampshire's child occupant protection statute by adding a requirement that children less than two years old remain in a rear facing safety seat. 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.

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 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.

Making these updates are critical because motor vehicle crashes are among the leading causes of death for children under age 14 in the U.S.ⁱ In 2020, the most recent year this data is available, 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.ⁱⁱ Use of appropriate child passenger safety seats are very effective in preventing injury: 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.

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.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that traffic fatalities in New Hampshire increased more than 13 percent (118 people were killed) in 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ The first nine months of 2022 worsened the upward trajectory with a more than 18 percent increase over the same period in 2021 (109 people were killed). Actions to improve traffic safety in the state are necessary. We urge you to advance SB 118 to improve the safety of vulnerable child passengers.

Sincerely,

Cathy Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Janette Fennell, Founder & President
Kids and Car Safety

Lorraine Martin, President and CEO
National Safety Council

cc: House Transportation Committee Members

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- ⁱ WISQARS, Leading Causes of Death Reports, 1981-2020, 2020, Top 10 leading causes of death, Ages 1 to 14, <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/fatal-leading>, last queried Nov. 2022.
 - 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 NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts New Hampshire 2012-2021. Available here <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm#>