



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



June 9, 2023

The Honorable Chris Sununu
Governor of New Hampshire
Office of the Governor
107 North Main Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Governor Sununu:

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 sign into law Senate Bill (SB) 118. The bill updates New Hampshire's child occupant protection statute by requiring 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 aged 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 account for 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 2021, the most recent year this data is available, 1,184 children aged 14 and younger were killed, an eight percent increase from 2020.ⁱⁱ In 2021, four children died in crashes in the state accounting for 3.4 percent of all traffic fatalities, higher than the national average of 2.8 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

Early estimates for traffic fatalities in New Hampshire find a staggering increase of more than 25 percent; 148 people were killed in 2022.^{iv} This increase is even more devastating when you consider that traffic fatalities had previously increased 18 percent in 2021.^v Actions to improve traffic safety in the state are critical. We urge you to sign SB 118 and 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

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 National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2023, May). Children: 2021 data (Traffic Safety Facts. Report No. DOT HS 813 456). NHTSA.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2023, May). Children: 2021 data (Traffic Safety Facts. Report No. DOT HS 813 456). NHTSA.

^{iv} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2023, April). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 428). NHTSA.

^v National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2023, April). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 428). NHTSA.