



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

November 30, 2023

The Honorable Walter F. Timilty, Chair
The Honorable Carlos González, Chair
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
24 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Chair Timilty and Chair González:

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 contain costs, supports House Bill (H) 2318 to update Massachusetts's child occupant protection statute by adding a requirement that children remain in a rear facing safety seat until at least two years old. 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.

Traffic safety is a serious issue in the Bay State that is in urgent need of proven solutions. In 2022, 433 people were killed in traffic crashes in Massachusetts according to an estimate from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), a 29 percent increase since 2019.ⁱ Additionally, Massachusetts incurred \$7.4 billion in economic harm due to motor vehicle crashes according to a 2019 analysis.ⁱⁱ

Massachusetts's current child passenger safety law requires children aged seven 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. Updating the state's child safety seat law to be consistent with such and to provide specific metrics for use to parents and caregivers will help ensure our vulnerable child passengers are better protected.

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.ⁱⁱⁱ 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.^{iv} Child passenger safety seats are very effective as they reduce fatalities by 47 percent for children ages 1-3 in all crashes and 52 percent in non-rollover crashes, when used correctly.^v

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.^{vi} 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.^{vii} 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.^{viii} Without the optimal support provided by a rear facing car seat, a young child is at risk of having their spinal cord stretch during a collision which can lead to serious injury or death.^{ix}

The public is keenly aware and concerned about the safety of child passengers. A poll we commissioned last year found that 65 percent of Americans are “extremely” or “very” concerned about lack of seat belt or child safety seat use.^x These fears are borne out by the relatively high share of traffic fatalities involving unrestrained young children, many of which could have been averted with proper restraints. In 2021, 31 percent of infants and 25 percent of toddlers ages 1-3 killed in passenger vehicles were unrestrained, when restraint use was known.^{xi}

We urge you to advance H 2318 to improve the safety of vulnerable child passengers by adopting a proven best practice that will save lives.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase
President

cc: The Honorable Michael D. Brady, Vice Chair
The Honorable David Biele, Vice Chair
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security Members

ⁱ Early Estimates: 2022 Traffic Crash Deaths, NHTSA, April 2023, DOT 813 HS 428, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813428>.

ⁱⁱ NHTSA. 2023. The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised), available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

^{iv} Traffic Safety Facts 2021 Data: Children, NHTSA May 2023, DOT HS 813 456, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813456>.

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

^{vi} Policy Statement – Child Passenger Safety, American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention, 201 available at <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/5/e20182460>.

^{vii} *Ibid.*

^{viii} *Ibid.*

^{ix} Car Seat Safety: Newborn to 2 Years, the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, available at <https://www.chop.edu/centers-programs/car-seat-safety-kids/car-seat-safety-by-age/newborn-2-years>.

^x ENGINE’S CARAVAN SURVEY Public Opinion Poll, January 2022, available at <https://saferoads.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Advocates-January2022-Poll-Report-Final.pdf>.

^{xi} Fatality Facts 2021 Children, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, available at <https://www.iihs.org/topics/fatality-statistics/detail/children#fn2>.