



OCCUPANT PROTECTION

PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT SEAT BELT LAWS

Issue

Seat belt use, reinforced by effective safety belt laws, is a proven lifesaver. Seat belts serve as the first line of defense against injury or death for vehicle occupants when crashes occur.

Impact

In 2022, more than 25,000 passenger vehicle occupants died in motor vehicle crashes. Among passenger vehicle occupant fatalities that year, it is estimated that half were unrestrained.

Solutions

Laws, Technology and Roadway Safety Infrastructure

Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Laws for All Occupants

Safety Technologies and Improved Safety Standards Can Protect Vehicle Occupants and Other Road Users

- Proven collision avoidance systems in vehicles including AEB, LDW, BSD, rear AEB and rear-cross traffic alert should be required.
- Rear seat belt reminders.

Road Safety Infrastructure Improvements and the Safe System Approach

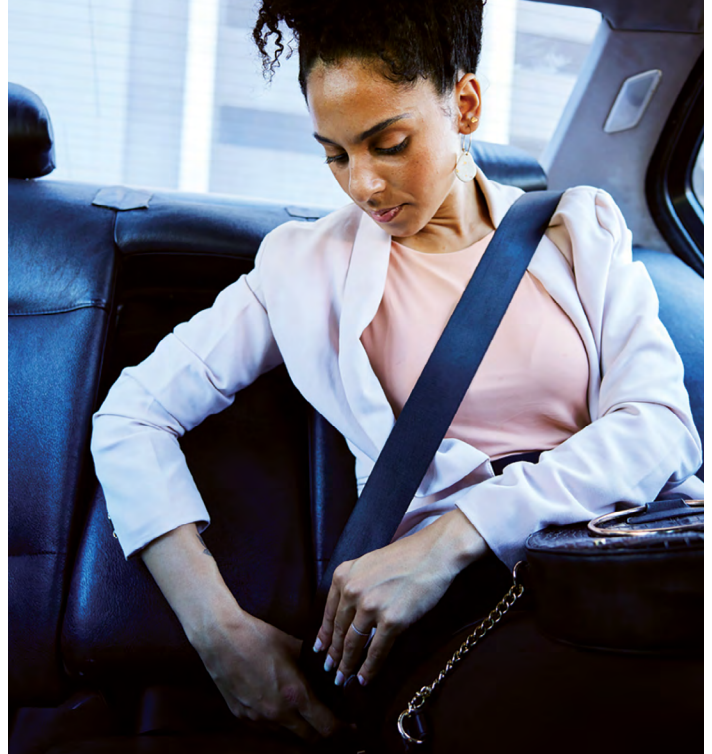


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The Facts

- From 1975 to 2019, seat belts saved over 403,000 lives and over \$2.5 trillion in economic costs.
- The NHTSA estimated that needless deaths and injuries resulting from non-use of seat belts cost society more than \$11 billion annually in medical care, lost productivity and other injury-related costs based on 2019 data. Updated for inflation alone, in 2024, the economic costs would be \$13.5 billion.
- Non-restraint use costs employers \$7.4 billion in 2018 (expressed in 2019 dollars), \$5.7 billion of which was attributed to off-the-job non-restraint use. Updated for inflation only, costs to employers in 2024 dollars would be over \$9 billion.
- In 2022, among passenger vehicle occupant fatalities with known restraint use, 48% seated in the front row and 60% of those in the second row were unrestrained.
- In fatal crashes in 2022, 83% of passenger vehicle occupants who were totally ejected from the vehicle were killed. Only 1% of the occupants reported to have been using restraints were totally ejected, compared with 26% of the unrestrained occupants.
- For passengers who survived fatal crashes in 2022, only 14% were unrestrained, whereas 50% of those who died lacked restraint use.
- NHTSA has identified a lack of seat belt use as one of “three major behavioral factors” contributing to the death toll on U.S. roads.
- The use of seat belts in passenger vehicles saved an estimated 14,653 lives nationwide in 2019. An additional 2,398 lives would have been saved in 2019 if all unrestrained passenger vehicle occupants had worn their seat belts.
- Rear seat passengers are more than twice as likely to die in a crash if they are unbelted.
- Adults are not buckling up in the rear seat as much as they are in the front seat, with rear seat belt use 10 to 15% lower than in the front seat, according to a study by the IIHS and the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention.



- An IIHS poll found nearly 40% of people surveyed sometimes did not buckle up in the rear seat because no law requires it. If such a law existed, 60% of poll respondents said it would convince them to use seat belts in the back seat.
- Rear seat belt use by passengers in fatal crashes was lower than front seat belt use in almost every state and was substantially lower in many states.
- Unbelted rear seat passengers pose a serious threat to the driver and other vehicle occupants, as well as themselves. Unbelted rear seat passengers are referred to as “back seat bullets” because they can be thrust at high rates of speed into the driver resulting in loss of control of the vehicle and into other occupants causing fatalities and serious injuries. The chance of death for a belted driver seated directly in front of an unrestrained passenger in a serious head-on crash was 2.27 times higher than if seated in front of a restrained passenger.

[Click here to learn more](#)



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Advocacy

A Doctor With Prescriptions for Safer Roadways



[Lenient seat belt laws in Massachusetts means people don't wear them](#)

8/4/17

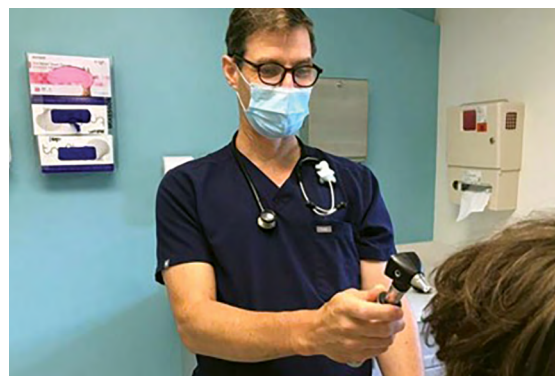
EXPERIENCE IN THE ER LED TO SAFETY ADVOCACY

Greg Parkinson dreamed of becoming a doctor as a child and after fulfilling that dream, he has dedicated 30 years of his life to pediatric care. For 25 of those years, he covered a hospital emergency department, where he witnessed firsthand the devastating toll of motor vehicle crashes on children. These preventable injuries and deaths fueled his resolve not just to treat young patients, but also to actively work toward legislative solutions that protect them.

A leader within the American Academy of Pediatrics' Massachusetts chapter, Dr. Parkinson co-chairs the Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention. He leverages his experience to educate lawmakers on the deadly consequences of not wearing seat belts or using improper child safety seats. He believes that legislators hold the power to be true superheroes because they can pass laws that save lives. Despite his demanding schedule, Dr. Parkinson sees his advocacy as one of the most meaningful aspects of his work and has said, "Nothing is better than saving a child's life."

LOOKING TO 2025

In 2025 Dr. Parkinson plans to stay active at the Statehouse on Boston's Beacon Hill. His priorities are the enactment of legislation to upgrade Massachusetts' seat belt law to primary enforcement to remedy the state's low seat belt usage rate and a measure to require children under two years of age to ride in the second row in a rear-facing safety seat. Both have been proposed before, but Dr. Parkinson is optimistic that they will get over the finish line in 2025. Advocates collaborated with Dr. Parkinson on both these measures in 2024, including testifying on a panel alongside him. We look forward to building on those efforts and coordinating with Dr. Parkinson to get vital traffic safety legislation enacted in 2025.



Dr. Parkinson examines a patient in his office in 2023



Dr. Parkinson speaking at the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2024



OCCUPANT PROTECTION

ALL-RIDER MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

Issue

Motorcycles are the most hazardous form of motor vehicle transportation.

Impact

In 2022, 6,218 motorcycle riders were killed. This is the highest fatality total in a single year since data collection began in 1975.

Solutions

Laws, Technology
and Roadway Safety
Infrastructure

All-Rider Helmet Requirements Are Effective, Reduce Costs and are Supported by the Public—

According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, “laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets are the only strategy proved to be effective in reducing motorcyclist fatalities.”

Safety Technology to Prevent Motorcycle Crashes

- Proven collision avoidance systems in vehicles including AEB, LDW, BSD, rear AEB and rear-cross traffic alert should be required to detect and safely respond, as appropriate, to vulnerable road users (VRUs) including motorcycle riders.
- Motorcycle anti-lock braking systems were associated with a 22% reduction in the rate of fatal crash involvements, according to IIHS research, and should be required as standard equipment.

Road Safety Infrastructure Improvements and the Safe System Approach



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ALL-RIDER MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

The Facts

- In 2022, when helmet use was known, 37% of motorcycle riders killed were not wearing a helmet.
- In October 2024, IIHS calculated that between 1976 and 2022, over 22,000 additional lives could have been saved if all states had all-rider motorcycle helmet laws.
- The observed use rate of U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)-compliant helmets among motorcycle riders was nearly 83% in states with all-rider helmet laws, compared to only 66% in other states in 2023.
- Motorcycle helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 69% and the risk of death by 42%.
- Annually, motorcycle crashes cost nearly \$17 billion in economic impacts and \$107 billion in societal harm as measured by comprehensive costs based on 2019 data. Updated for inflation alone, in 2024, the economic costs would be \$21 billion in economic impacts, and over \$131 billion in societal harm. Serious injuries and fatalities accounted for 83% of total comprehensive costs of motorcycle crashes, compared to 60% of the total comprehensive costs of all motor vehicle crashes.
- According to NHTSA, in 2022, there were 7.7 times as many unhelmeted fatalities (1,986) in states without a universal helmet law compared to states with a universal helmet law (258).
- In states without all-rider helmet laws, 54% of motorcycle riders killed in 2022 were not wearing helmets, compared to 11% in states with such laws.
- In Michigan, which repealed its all-rider helmet law in 2012, there would have been 26 fewer motorcycle crash deaths (a 21% reduction) that year if the helmet mandate was still in place, according to the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute. Additionally, in the remainder of the year after the helmet repeal was enacted, only 74% of motorcycle riders involved in crashes were helmeted, compared to 98% in the same time period of the previous four years.



- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), in states with only youth-specific helmet laws, helmet use has decreased, and youth mortality has increased. Serious traumatic brain injury among young riders was 38% higher in states with only age-specific laws compared to states with all-rider helmet laws.
- All-rider motorcycle helmet law repeal efforts, which include motorcycle education and training requirements, fail to meet the safety benefit provided by a universal helmet law. There is no scientific evidence that motorcycle rider training reduces crash risk.

[Click here to learn more](#)



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Advocacy

Public Health Advocate Stands as a Bulwark Against Annual Motorcycle Helmet Repeal Effort in Maryland

“Here we have an effective public health measure that reduces injury and death in our community and repealing it for any part of the population will result in increased injury and death.”

Kathi Hoke testifying before the Environment and Transportation Committee in the Maryland House of Delegates

2/15/24

LAWYER’S CLIENT IS PUBLIC HEALTH

Kathleen “Kathi” Hoke wears many hats. She is a professor at the University of Maryland (UMD) Carey School of Law where she teaches the Public Health Law Clinic and serves as the director of the Legal Resource Center for Public Health Policy at UMD. In these roles she bridges the law and social science to put them together to promote the health of all Marylanders.

Kathi always wanted to practice law but never expected public health to become her focus. Early in her career, Kathi worked in the Maryland Attorney General’s office, where she got involved in public health through the state’s settlement with tobacco companies. Part of the settlement was funding the creation of a public health research center at the law school in which she quickly became heavily involved.

Kathi’s work in public health led her to oppose an effort to repeal Maryland’s all-rider helmet law beginning in 2016. She quickly emerged as an invaluable advocate against repeal and for years has organized a coalition, of which Advocates is an active participant. The coalition has successfully fought repeal efforts via letters, testimony, meetings, media and other advocacy.

LOOKING TO 2025

Despite the defeat of multiple repeal efforts in the past, Kathi knows the importance of staying vigilant as others seek to roll back progress on this issue. Another motorcycle repeal effort is expected to be introduced in the Maryland legislature in 2025, and Advocates will be back in Annapolis with Kathi to lead the charge against it. Her message to legislators is simple, “If it is not broken, don’t fix it. The all-rider helmet law has been effective in MD and every other state that has adopted it.”



Kathi Hoke with former students outside the Environment and Transportation Committee hearing room in the Maryland House of Delegates in 2019



Kathi Hoke testifying in opposition to H.B. 639, in the Maryland House of Delegates’ Environment and Transportation Committee, 2/15/24

