



April 7, 2025

The Honorable John J. Cronin, Chair
The Honorable Daniel Cahill, Chair
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
24 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Chair Cronin and Chair Cahill:

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 Senate Bill (S) 1657/House Bill (H) 2603 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 oldⁱ and be in a rear facing or a forward facing child passenger restraint system after outgrowing rear facing safety seats. 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 2023, 348 people were killed in traffic crashes in Massachusetts according to an estimate from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).ⁱⁱ Additionally, Massachusetts incurs \$7.4 billion in economic harm due to motor vehicle crashes, which is equivalent to \$1,072 per resident according to a 2019 analysis.ⁱⁱⁱ When updated for inflation alone, in 2025, costs would equate to \$9.3 billion and \$1,353 respectively.^{iv}

Massachusetts's current child passenger safety law requires children ages 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.

These updates are critical because motor vehicle crashes are among the leading causes of death for children under age 14 in the U.S.^v In 2022, the most recent year this data is available, 1,129 children ages 14 and younger were killed in traffic crashes representing three children killed each day on average.^{vi} This included 281 children three and younger and 252 children ages 4-7.^{vii} Use of appropriate child passenger safety seats is 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.^{viii}

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.^{ix} 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.^x

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

The public is keenly aware and concerned about the safety of child passengers. A poll we commissioned in 2024 found that 62 percent of Americans are “extremely” or “very” concerned about lack of seat belt or child safety seat use.^{xiii} These fears are borne out by the relatively high level of traffic fatalities involving unrestrained young children, many of which could have been averted with proper restraints. In 2022, 26 percent of children younger than one year old and 24 percent of children ages 1-3 killed in passenger vehicles were unrestrained, when restraint use was known.^{xiv}

We urge you to advance S 1657/H 2603 to improve the safety of vulnerable child passengers and save lives.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase
President

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- i Unless the child reaches the height or weight limit of the seat before attaining the age of two.
- ii Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2023, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 561, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813561>.
- iii NHTSA. 2023. The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised), available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.
- iv CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, Jan. 2019 to Jan. 2025, available at <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.
- v WISQARS, 10 Leading Causes of Death, Unites States 2022, available [here](#), last queried Sept. 2024.
- vi Traffic Safety Facts 2022 Data: Children, NHTSA Jun 2024, DOT HS 813 575, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813575>.
- vii Traffic Safety Facts 2022 Data: Children, NHTSA Jun 2024, DOT HS 813 575, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813575>.
- viii Evaluation of Child Restraint System Effectiveness, NHTSA, December 2020, DOT HS 813 047, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813047>.
- ix 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>.
- x *Ibid.*
- xi *Ibid.*
- xii 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>.
- xiii Engine’s Caravan Survey Public Opinion Poll, December 2024, available [here](#).
- xiv Fatality Facts 2022 Children, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, available [here](#).