ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

August 20, 2025

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Vice Chair
The Honorable Kip A. Diggs, Assistant Vice Chair
The Honorable Todd M. Smola, Ranking Minority Member
House Committee on Ways and Means
General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
24 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Ferrante, Assistant Vice Chair Diggs and Ranking Minority Member Smola:

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 (SB) 1657/House Bill (HB) 2603 to update the child occupant protection statute by adding a requirement that children remain in a rear facing safety seat until at least two years old[i] 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, 343 people were killed in traffic crashes in Massachusetts.[ii] Additionally, the Bay State 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]

The 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 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 2023, 1,019 children ages 14 and younger were killed in traffic crashes representing three children killed each day on average.[vi] This included 257 children three and younger and 210 children ages 4-7.[vii] An additional 161,478 children were injured in 2023, equating to 442 children injured each day.[viii] 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.[ix]

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.[x] 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.[xi] 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.[xii] 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.[xiii]

The public is keenly aware and concerned about the safety of child passengers. A 2024 poll found that 62 percent of Americans are "extremely" or "very" concerned about lack of seat belt or child safety seat use.[xiv] 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 2023, 28 percent of children younger than one year old and 27 percent of children ages 1-3 killed in passenger vehicles were unrestrained, when restraint use was known.[xv]

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

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase
President

cc: House Committee on Ways and Means members

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[i] Unless the child reaches the height or weight limit of the seat before attaining the age of two.

[ii] State Traffic Safety Information for Massachusetts, NHTSA, available at https://cdan.dot.gov/STSI/stsi.htm.

[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 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.

[vii] Traffic Safety Facts 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.

[viii] Traffic Safety Facts 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.

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

[x] 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.

[xi] *Ibid.*

[xii] *Ibid.*

[xiii] 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.

[xiv] Engine's Caravan Survey Public Opinion Poll, December 2024, available here.

[xv] Traffic Safety Facts 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.