ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

January 26, 2026

The Honorable Megan Jones, Chair
House Transportation Subcommittee
Iowa Legislature
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Chair Jones:

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 enactment of House Study Bill (HSB) 575 to establish protections for child passengers. However, we recommend making a couple small, yet important, modifications to further enhance the safety of child passengers.

Motor vehicle crashes are among the leading causes of death for children under age 14 in the U.S.[1] In 2023, 1,019 children ages 14 and younger were killed in traffic crashes, which is three pediatric deaths each day on average.[2] An estimated additional 161,478 children were injured in 2023, equating to 442 harmed children each day.[3] Improperly restrained children traveling in vehicles present a serious yet fixable public health problem. Across all age groups, injury risk is lowest (less than two percent) when children are placed in an age-appropriate restraint in the rear seat.[4] 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.[5]

HSB 575 will improve the child passenger safety law by requiring children to be restrained in a rear-facing safety seat until age two and children to be secured by a child passenger restraint system until age eight.

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.[6] 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.[7] 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.[8] 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.[9]

We recommend adding a height component to the age eight requirement for remaining in a child restraint system. The AAP identifies the best practice for transitioning out of a booster seat and into a seat belt is "typically when they have reached 4 ft 9 inches in height and are between 8 and 12 y. of age."[10] This recommendation is supported by growth charts for the average development of children which find that more than 95 percent of boys and girls are less than 4 feet 9 inches in height at age nine.[11] Therefore, in the vast majority of cases, the transition from a booster seat to seat belts should occur beyond age eight and accordingly, we support an amendment to require booster seats for children until they are at least eight years old and 4 ft 9 inches.

We also recommend adding a requirement that children ride in a rear seat until age 13. Children are safest in vehicles when they are appropriately restrained in a rear seat. Front seats can be dangerous for children under 13 because air bags and seatbelts are designed for adults (in size and weight).[12] Being in a rear seat reduces the risk of death for children by 46 percent in vehicles with passenger air bags.[13] A literature review found that the risk of injury or death for children is 40 percent to 70 percent higher in front seats.[14] The risk of fatal injury in rear seats is 41 percent lower for ages 1-4 and 30 percent lower for ages 5-12.[15]

The public is keenly aware and concerned about the safety of child passengers. A 2024 poll commissioned by Advocates found that 84 percent of Americans are "concerned," with 62 percent "extremely" or "very" concerned about lack of seat belt or child safety seat use.[16] 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.[17]

We appreciate your consideration and urge you to upgrade and advance HSB 575 to enhance the safety of our most vulnerable passengers.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

cc: House Transportation Subcommittee members

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1 WISQARS, 10 Leading Causes of Death, Unites States 2023, available here, last queried Aug. 2025.
2 Traffic Safety Facts 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.
3 Traffic Safety Facts 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.
4 Risk of Child Injury by Seat Row and Restraint Type, 1998-2002, Age 0-12 years, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, 2014. Available at https://injury.research.chop.edu/sites/default/files/documents/seat_row_0.pdf.
5 Evaluation of Child Restraint System Effectiveness, NHTSA, December 2020, DOT HS 813 047, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813047.
6 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.
7 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.
8 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.
9 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.
10 Durbin D, Hoffman B. Child Passenger Safety. AAP policy statement from Council on Injury Violence and Poison Prevention. Pediatrics. 2018b;142(5):e20182460. Available at https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2460.
11 Clinical Growth Charts, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control, available at https://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/clinical_charts.htm.
12 Air Bags, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, available at https://www.chop.edu/pages/air-bags.
13 Seating positions and children's risk of dying in motor vehicle crashes, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Quality Control Systems Corporation, available at https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1730389/pdf/v004p00181.pdf.
14 Child Passenger Safety: An Evidence-Based Review, the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma, available here.
15 Child Passenger Safety: An Evidence-Based Review, the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma, available here.
16 Engine's Caravan Survey Public Opinion Poll, December 2024, available here.
17 Traffic Safety Facts 2023 Data: Children, NHTSA April 2025, DOT HS 813 712, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813712.