LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PENNSYLVANIA

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STATEMENT PRESENTED BEFORE THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
ON HOUSE BILL 562 (589)
AUGUST 16, 1981, MONROEVILLE, PA.

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Transportation Committee. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify here today. I am Marilyn Skolnick, Urban Policy/Transportation Director of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, speaking on behalf of the 66 local Leagues in Pennsylvania.

The League has been concerned about transportation since 1971. Our members are supportive of all types of public transportation including vanpools and carpools, when adequate public transportation is not available. Most public transportation in Pennsylvania is provided by busses. In addition, all public school districts provide some transportation for their students. It is for these reasons that League is particularly interested in H562, providing for the registration and inspection of vehicles.

Most of the revisions presented in the bill seem to be reasonable. However, the League opposes the changes on page 4, section 5, subsections (a) and (b) concerning inspection of vehicles. I would like to deal with subsection (b) first, "Semiannual Inspection of Certain Vehicles".

League endorses the concept of two inspections a year for school busses, mass transit vehicles and motor carrier vehicles. It appears, however, that the bill eliminates motorcycles and fire-fighting vehicles from this subsection. Are these to be the "vehicles" included in subsection (a)? We do not wish to see inspections for those vehicles omitted.

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania opposes subsection (a), "Annual inspection--except as provided in subsection (b)". We strongly urge the retention of two inspections a year.

No one will dispute the fact that the automobile is inexorably interwoven into American life. The automobile has provided freedom of movement that no other kind of transportation has ever provided. However, this freedom has its price. Traffic accidents are now the 6th leading cause of death in the United States.

"While many factors are involved in causing accidents, motor vehicle defects have been shown to be responsible for between 5 and 12% of all accidents. This means that as many as two million accidents a year involving safety defects could be occuring on our nation's roadways. Worn brakes and tires are known to be the leading causes of safety defects."[1]

We are concerned that next to wearing a safety belt, a car's weight is one of the most important factors affecting passenger safety.[2] The number of cars that are smaller or subcompact in size is growing proportionately to the increase in the cost of gasoline. By 1980, the percent of small cars in the nation increased to 88% of all cars.[3] Because of the vulnerability of small cars to accidents, a vehicle must be maintained in as safe as possible mechanical condition. The margin for error has to be decreased measurably, because a public health problem of unbelievable dimensions exists in both harm to human health and economic waste.

"By 1975, motor vehicle crash injuries, conservatively estimated, were costing the nation more than $14 billion annually including the cost of emergency medical aid, hospital care, rehabilitation, lost wages and other direct and indirect costs. These costs exceed $20 billion today.

"Of the leading causes of death to Americans, motor vehicle crash injuries are second only to cancer in their economic burden. They account for about 52,000 deaths a year, and for the majority of new cases of paraplegia and quadriplegia. They are the single leading cause of severe facial lacerations and fractures. They contribute prominently to new cases of epilepsy and brain damage, and kill more Americans ages 1 through 35 than ANY OTHER CAUSE."[4]

The cost burden is growing worse and shall continue unless conditions are changed. Preventing and minimizing motor vehicle crash injuries would be a far less expensive course of action than suffering the present economic cost burden.

Considerable research on the subject of preventive maintenance through vehicle inspections has shown it unwise to change the semiannual auto inspection to an annual inspection.

A study entitled VEHICLE-IN-USE SAFETY STANDARDS prepared for the U. S. Department of Transportation by Ultrasystems Incorporated, found that in the sampling of vehicles from California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C., there was a significant difference between the condition of vehicles in these states. The vehicles in Pennsylvania were in the best condition. Based on the number of vehicles in need of maintenance according to the manufacturer's specifications, there was a significant difference between states that have periodic motor vehicle inspection (PMVI) and those that have random motor vehicle inspections (California). The state with two inspections per year utilizing privately operated vehicle inspection stations (Pennsylvania) produces vehicles in significantly better condition than the state with one inspection per year utilizing state operated inspection stations (New Jersey). New Jersey in turn produced vehicles in better condition than the vehicles in the state with random inspection, California.[5]

In another study performed by Ultrasystems for the U. S. Department of Transportation, entitled OPTIMUM FREQUENCY OF INSPECTION, "It has been determined by previous U. S. DOT studies that the most safety-critical vehicle system is the braking system. Moreover, this has been confirmed by accident investigation studies, and by

studies of the effect of brake degradation on vehicle performance. Past research has also demonstrated that periodic motor vehicle inspection definately produces vehicles that are in better safety condition than would otherwise be the case."

The study made the following recommendations. A recommended optimum frequency of inspection plan consists of the following:

a. Inspect brake fluid level every six months on all cars
b. The brake tester should be utilized on all cars every six months in conjunction with the brake fluid level test
c. All front wheel brake components should be inspected every six months, beginning at a vehicle age of 18 months
d. The front brake hose should be inspected every six months beginning at vehicle age of three years.[6]

The study entitled THE EFFECTS OF AUTOMOBILE INSPECTIONS ON ACCIDENT RATES written by The Kenneth E. Johnson Environmental and Energy Center, the University of Alabama for the U. S. DOT, concluded in the study that inspected vehicles had a 9.1% lower accident rate than uninspected vehicles. Vehicles with only one inspection per year with the passage of time, degraded to a condition equivalent to uninspected vehicles. After this degradation their accident rate was the same as the uninspected vehicles suggesting that a minimum of 9.2% reduction in accident rates is possible. The last observation was that after comparing the accident rates of the auto check inspected vehicles prior to and after inspection, (and presumably after repairs were done), indicated that the post inspection accident rate dropped 11.8%.

Since the experiment took place in an area where the auto check program was voluntary, the participants were not under any legal requirement to have their vehicles inspected. The study further concludes that if such a legal requirement had been in force, the accident rate reduction would have probably been greater.[7]

In light of the studies quoted and the statistical information, it is inappropriate to reduce the number of automobile inspections from two to one a year. It is not in the best interests of the passengers or drivers.

In conclusion, the moderate costs connected with two inspections annually are minor in comparison with the costs due to accidents.

Let us not get into the same frame of mind that permitted hotels in Las Vegas to say that it was too costly to install fire prevention equipment with horrifying results. If we must err, let us err on the side of caution.

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania enthusiastically supports two annual car inspections for all motor vehicles.
Thank you.

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