



**ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
AND AUTO SAFETY**

FAX COVER SHEET

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COMMENTS:

To Whom it May Concern:

Attached please find written testimony submitted by the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety for the Transportation Committee hearing on August 27, 2002.

We regret that we are unable to make the trip to Harrisburg to distribute these materials ourselves. In our absence, we ask that you distribute our testimony in support of House Bill 2447 to the Committee members and any relevant staff. Thank you.



ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY

Statement of Catherine Chase Director of State Affairs Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety Before the Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee In Support of House Bill 2447, Child Safety Seats August 27, 2002

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Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), a nonprofit coalition of consumer, safety, health, law enforcement, and insurance companies and organizations, urges the Transportation Committee to favorably report HB 2447. This legislation will protect Pennsylvania's child passengers by strengthening the current child safety seat law.

In 2001, an average of 7 children were killed and 856 were injured every day in motor vehicle crashes on our nation's roads. A recent study shows that in Pennsylvania, almost one in three of the children in serious crashes sustained an injury, and 72% of the serious injuries were to the head or face. Many of these injuries and deaths could have been prevented if the children were properly restrained.

HB 2447, which will increase the age up to which children must be properly secured in an appropriate child safety seat from 4 to 7, is a common sense and scientifically supported bill. According to our nation's experts on child passenger safety, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the American Academy of Pediatrics and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), children who outgrow child safety seats should ride in a booster seat until an adult seat belt fits properly. Seat belts are not designed for children; they do not fit children properly and thus, children need a "boost" to help the belts fit correctly.

An improper seat belt fit causes the lap belt to ride up over the stomach and the shoulder belt to cut across the neck, which can cause critical or even fatal injuries in the event of a crash. Currently, 88% of 4 to 8-year-old children in Pennsylvania are inappropriately restrained in an adult seat belt, according to Partners for Child Passenger Safety (PCPS), a research partnership of CHOP and State Farm Insurance.

Booster seats are simple devices that elevate a child off of a car seat so that the seat belt fits them properly. They are easy to install – they are just placed on a car seat and used with the lap/shoulder seat belt. They are inexpensive. Some cost approximately the same amount as a tank of gas, and there are numerous give-away programs for families who cannot afford them. And, they are easily transportable. Just as a parent drops off a child at soccer practice with shin guards and a mouth guard to protect them from getting hurt on the field, they can drop them off with a booster seat so that they can be properly protected in a car pool from the dangers on the roads.



Yet, some opponents of this legislation argue that the decision of whether to put a child in a booster seat should be left to the parent. While the safety of a child is the responsibility of a parent, parents look to experts for guidance on how to best protect their children. Many parents believe that if it's not the law, it's not necessary, and they unknowingly put their children at risk by buckling them up in safety belts, which are designed for adults.

Not only does HB 2447 have the potential to save numerous lives and prevent thousands of injuries to children, but it is also overwhelmingly supported by the public. A recent Lou Harris public opinion poll commissioned by Advocates found that almost 80% of those surveyed support extending child safety seat laws to include booster seats.

Advocates urges the Committee to join its neighbors New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware in enacting this lifesaving legislation. By supporting HB 2447, you will be educating and empowering parents with knowledge that could save their children's lives.

Thank you for your consideration.