

Philip W. Haseltine

Phil Haseltine has four decades of experience in highway safety dating back to 1970. He spent 13 years in Michigan state government where he headed the Office of Highway Safety Planning, a division of the Michigan State Police and served as the governor's highway safety representative. He was elected three times as chairman of the National Association of Governors Highway Safety Representatives (now the Governors Highway Safety Association).

Mr. Haseltine moved to Washington in 1983, where he initially served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Policy and International Affairs and then as Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Transportation.

He left the federal government in 1988 and directed the auto industry-funded Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS) for 20 years. During that time he served on several boards and commissions in the Reagan and Clinton Administrations. He also served as executive director of the National Safety Council's Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign. After retiring from ACTS in February 2008, he has continued his involvement in several highway safety issues and does highway safety consulting through Haseltine Safety Consulting, LLC.

A native of Detroit, Mr. Haseltine is a graduate of Michigan State University. He currently resides in Arlington, Virginia.

Statement of Philip W. Haseltine
Before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Transportation Committee
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, let me start by thanking you for holding this important hearing and inviting me to testify. My name is Phil Haseltine and, as my attached bio notes, I have spent the past forty years working in the field of traffic safety. Throughout that time, I have devoted more of my energy to occupant protection and seat belt use than to any other issue. That is not so much a matter of personal preference, but because no other known countermeasure would do so much to reduce fatalities and serious injuries on our highways as getting all motorists to buckle up.

Currently I operate a part time consulting business, with clients including the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers. The Alliance continues a long-term auto industry leadership role in promoting seat belt use and belt use laws that extends back to the late 1970s. Currently the Alliance leads an ad hoc coalition of organizations encouraging states to enact primary enforcement belt use laws. I am here today to share information and a perspective that may be useful to you as you contemplate possible changes to Pennsylvania's adult seat belt use law.

We all know that seat belts save lives but, the full extent to which seat belts are effective in reducing the risk of fatalities in certain types of common crashes is less well-known. We frequently hear that seat belts are 45 to 60 percent effective in reducing fatalities, which is true. But, as the following chart illustrates, seat belts are even more effective in some crash types. Wearing a seat belt actually reduces your risk of being killed in a rollover crash by 74 to 80 percent, depending on whether you are riding in a passenger car or light truck:

Overall Effectiveness of Seat Belts – Fatality Reductions

DOT HS 809 199 – Dec. 2000

	Passenger Cars	Light Trucks
Overall	45%	60%
Frontal	50%	53%
Near Side Impact	10%	41%
Far Side Impact	39%	58%
Rollover	74%	80%
Rear Impact	56%	81%

Despite the well-known effectiveness of seat belts, as documented in this National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study, experience throughout the United States and elsewhere shows that the highest usage rates are only obtained when jurisdictions enact and enforce sound laws with meaningful penalties. Among the key provisions of the most effective seat belt laws is primary or standard enforcement, allowing law enforcement officers to stop and cite violators just as they can for any other traffic law violation.

Pennsylvania has done a commendable job in achieving relatively high belt use despite having a law that does not allow standard enforcement. But, there is room for substantial improvement. The 2009 observed use rate of 87.9 percent is above the national rate of 84 percent and among the highest of any state with a secondary enforcement law.

Unfortunately however, many of those who do not buckle up exhibit other high-risk behaviors and are over-involved in serious crashes. And, the observed use rate is based on surveys taken during daylight hours while belt use is generally lower at night when many serious crashes occur.

While recent surveys show that more than 85 percent of front seat vehicle occupants are buckled up, crash data show a very different picture. In 2008, 62 percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed in Pennsylvania crashes were not wearing their seat belts (compared to 55 percent nationwide). And, of those who died in nighttime crashes, 74 percent were unrestrained.

This information, coupled with data from 22 states and the District of Columbia that have changed their seat belt laws to allow standard enforcement, provides strong evidence that removing the prohibition against standard enforcement in Pennsylvania will increase seat belt use, save lives and reduce economic costs to commonwealth and local governments. The NHTSA estimates that a primary enforcement seat belt law in this state would increase the observed use rate by approximately six percentage points, saving about 59 lives and 867 serious injuries annually.

I view these numbers as being conservative. A primary enforcement law, coupled with reasonable enforcement levels could easily result in an observed use rate in the 95 percent range. Given the rural nature of much of the state and a 95 percent use rate, fatality and serious injury reductions might be expected to exceed the NHTSA projected levels.

Despite all of the documented benefits of buckling up and the need for strong laws to encourage motorists to do so, many legislators are reluctant to support primary enforcement legislation. The arguments against primary generally fall into one of two areas. First are concerns about the proper role of government, the belief that "It's a personal decision and government should stay out of our personal lives." Second are concerns about increasing the potential for racial profiling by law enforcement officers. Both are legitimate concerns that can be satisfactorily addressed.

The Legislature reached a conclusion on the proper role of government when it passed the current seat belt law in 1987. The law is firmly in place. The only issue at hand is how that law should be enforced. I would argue that if you are going to pass a law, it should have meaningful sanctions comparable to similar laws and that a significant majority of citizens will be supportive.

With respect to racial profiling, it is an issue that should be promptly and effectively addressed wherever it exists. But, racial profiling is not related to the enforcement of seat belt laws. Study after study in states changing from secondary enforcement to primary enforcement show no increase in profiling by law enforcement. Primary enforcement laws have the support of many organizations concerned with the civil rights of African Americans, Hispanics and other ethnic groups. President Obama, when he was a member of the Illinois State Senate, co-sponsored the primary enforcement bill that was enacted into law.

In closing, I have observed many state legislatures debating the same issues you are no-doubt concerned about. When the debate has ended and primary enforcement bills have been enacted; seat belt use has increased, serious injuries and fatalities have declined, economic costs to government have been reduced and, the controversy surrounding the issue has all but disappeared.

I urge you to consider the benefits, look at the experiences of states that have enacted primary laws, and vote to let law enforcement officers in Pennsylvania to enforce the state's seat belt law in the same manner they enforce other traffic laws.

I would be pleased to answer any questions. Or, feel free to contact me by email at
or by phone at

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.