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Testimony for Transportation Committee – HB 6821
Submitted by Aaron Kupec, Public Affairs Manager, AAA Allied Group, Inc.
February 23, 2015

I thank the members of the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of AAA Hartford, in support of HB 6821, which among other provisions, requires all passengers in a vehicle to wear seat belts, including those age 17 and over in the back seat, who are currently exempt.

Each year, some 33,000 people are killed in motor vehicle crashes in the U.S. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, car crashes are the leading cause of death for people age 4 and every age 11 through 27.

With up to 60 percent effectiveness, seat belts are the single best means of reducing the risk of death in a crash, and have saved nearly 300,000 lives since 1975. That's more than the populations of Hartford and New Haven combined. Seat belts are also the best defense against impaired, aggressive and distracted drivers.

When Connecticut passed its seat belt law in 1985, the conventional wisdom was that the back seat was a safe area for unrestrained passengers.

However, over the years, research and numerous real-life situations on Connecticut roadways have proved this theory wrong.

We've since learned unbelted passengers, no matter where they sit in a vehicle, not only place themselves at risk, but threaten others in the vehicle.

[A 2004 study published in The Journal of the American Medical Association](#), found that the use of **rear-seat safety belts** could prevent about one in six deaths of **front-seat occupants** caused by car crashes.

The argument has been made that requiring seat belt use is a matter of "personal freedom." But in our society, personal freedom stops where others are injured or killed.

Let me put it another way: According to the National Child Passenger Safety Certification Training Program, a car going 40 miles per hour would hit a tree with the same force as hitting the ground after falling off a 50-foot cliff. Someone unbuckled, in the back seat of that car would hit the front seat, another occupant, the dashboard, or the windshield with the same force as hitting the ground after a fall from a five-story building. A seat belt can stop that fall.

When Connecticut first adopted its seat belt law, it did so to save lives.

By passing this bill, you will join the nearly seven in ten AAA members in Connecticut who support mandatory safety belt use in **every** seating position, and clearly demonstrate Connecticut's continued leadership in traffic safety.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.