



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

**Statement of Jacqueline S. Gillan
President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
In Support of House Bill 6821
Joint Committee on Transportation
Connecticut General Assembly
February 23, 2015**

Good morning, my name is Jacqueline Gillan and I am the President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates). Advocates is a coalition of consumer, safety, public health and medical groups, and insurance companies and organizations working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill (H.B.) 6821, which will strengthen Connecticut's seat belt law by requiring all passengers in the rear seat of a motor vehicle to wear a safety belt.

This legislation will address an identified public health risk in Connecticut. In 2013, of the 182 passenger vehicle occupants killed, 41 percent were unrestrained.¹ Yet, 90 lives were saved in 2012 because of seat belts. One hundred (100) percent seat belt use in Connecticut would have saved an additional 22 lives (NHTSA, 2013). Rear seat belt usage is higher in states with laws that include rear seat occupants. In 2011, rear seat belt usage was 83 percent in states with this law, compared to only 67 percent without a comprehensive law (NHTSA, 2013).

Unrestrained rear seat passengers are a serious safety problem especially considering they are often children and teens. Tragically, 61 percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed throughout the country in 2012, who were seated in the rear or second seat of a vehicle, were unrestrained (NHTSA, 2014). According to the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), seat belt use can be the difference between life and death. When used properly seat belts reduce the number of serious traffic injuries by 50 percent and fatalities by 60-70 percent. Seat belt use also helps to prevent ejection from the vehicle. Vehicle occupants are 25 times more likely to be killed or injured if thrown from the car (ConnDOT). Moreover, unbelted back seat passengers pose a potentially fatal threat to others during a crash including front seat passengers who are buckled up.²

Seat belt usage by teens is the lowest of any segment of society.³ In fact, nationally, in 2012, the majority (55 percent) of young people 16 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes were unbuckled (NHTSA, 2014). Requiring all passengers riding in the rear seats of vehicles to wear seat belts is an important step toward saving teens from serious death and injury resulting from crashes.

¹ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), *Restraint Use*. 2014.

² Mayrose J, Jehle D, Hayes M, Tinnesz D, Piazza G, Wilding GE; *Influence of the Unbelted Rear-Seat Passenger on Driver Mortality: "The Backseat Bullet"*, *Academic Emergency Medicine*, Vol. 12(2), (2005).

³ NHTSA, 2008.

Seat belts not only save lives, they also save taxpayer dollars. In Connecticut, “from 2007 to 2013, motor vehicle crashes resulted in 14,012 hospital in-patient discharges, 191,984 emergency room visits and over \$444 million in emergency department charges.”⁴ According to NHTSA, deaths and injuries resulting from non-use of seat belts cost society an estimated \$60 billion annually in medical care, lost productivity and other injury related costs. In addition, unbelted crash victims have medical bills that are 50 percent higher than belted victims, and society bears 74 percent of the cost through increased insurance premiums, taxes, and health care costs (NHTSA).

If enacted, this commonsense legislation will save lives and taxpayer dollars. For every single death, the lives of surviving mothers, fathers, siblings, family, friends and communities are irrevocably shattered. These deaths are unnecessary and unacceptable, particularly when a solution is at hand. Advocates urges you to support H.B. 6821.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Gillan
President

⁴ Connecticut Department of Health, *Unintentional Injury*, available at:
<http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3137&q=390296>