New Car Seat Requirements Under PA 17-230

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September 27, 2017 | 2017-R-0223

Issue

Provide a plain language summary of the car seat provisions enacted in PA 17-230 (§ 11).

Summary

The new car seat law increases the age and weight thresholds for car seats and generally requires that car seats be equipped with five-point harnesses. Under this law, there are four categories based on a child’s age and weight, and each category provides one or more car seat options. If a child falls into either the age or weight range in a given category, he or she must be transported in one of the car seats allowed under that category. If a child’s weight and age fall under two different categories, he or she must be transported in a car seat that is an option under both of the applicable categories. Therefore, in effect, the more restrictive car seat requirement applies.

Chart 1 illustrates the new law’s requirements, effective October 1, 2017. As under prior law, car seats must meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (Conn. Agencies Regs., § 14-100a-1).
Chart 1: New Car Seat Requirements
(PA 17-230, § 11, Effective 10/1/17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Weight Range</th>
<th>Car Seat Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Less than 30</td>
<td>Rear-facing seat with five-point harness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Front-facing or rear-facing seat with five-point harness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>Booster seat with seat belt or any of the above listed restraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>60 or more</td>
<td>Seat belt or any of the above listed restraints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children Who Fall Under Two Categories

In some cases, a child’s weight and age may fall under two different categories. In these cases, a child must be transported in a car seat that is an option under both of the applicable categories. Therefore, in effect, the more restrictive requirement applies. Put differently, a child must meet both the age and weight criteria under a category in order to use the less restrictive car seat option.

For example, a boy who is 18 months old and weighs 32 pounds falls under Category 1 (rear-facing seat with five-point harness) because he is under age two. He also falls under Category 2 (front-facing or rear-facing seat with five-point harness) because he is between 30 and 39 pounds. Although the boy has two car seat options based on his weight, he has only one based on his age. Therefore, the only way to comply with the law is to use the seat that is an option under both categories: a rear-facing seat. He may not use a front-facing car seat until he turns two.

Prior Law

Prior law required children under age one or weighing less than 20 pounds to be secured in a rear-facing child restraint. It required children age (1) six and younger or weighing less than 60 pounds to be secured in a child restraint (e.g., car seat or booster seat) that met federal motor vehicle safety standards and (2) seven or older and weighing at least 60 pounds to either use a restraint or wear a seat belt.
Penalties for Violations

Existing law, unchanged by the act, subjects individuals who violate the car seat requirements to penalties. A first violation is an infraction and a second violation is punishable by a fine of up to $199. Each subsequent violation is a class A misdemeanor.

The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner must require anyone who commits a first or second violation to attend a DMV-approved child car seat safety course. If a violator fails to attend or successfully complete the course, the commissioner, after providing notice and an opportunity for a hearing, may suspend his or her driver's license for up to two months (CGS § 14-100a(d)).

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