Bill No.: HB-7196
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH’S RECOMMENDATION REGARDING SEAT BELTS.
Vote Date: 3/8/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/4/2019
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill requires all passengers in a motor vehicle or any vehicle used by firefighters to wear seat belts while the vehicle is moving. Under current law only the operator of a motor vehicle and the front seat passenger are required to wear seat belts, with the exception of passengers of vehicle operators under age 18, passengers under 16, or those requiring a child safety seat. The requirements in the bill do not apply to passengers on buses or vehicles manufactured before January 1, 1968.

As in current law, failure to wear a seat belt is not probable cause for law enforcement to search a vehicle or its contents.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Raul Pino, MD, MPH, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH): DPH strongly supports this legislation. Statistics show that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people ages 5-34. More than half of those killed were not wearing seat belts. Among the young adults in the 18-34 age group killed in car crashes in the United States in 2016, more than half were unrestrained. According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NHTSA), opponents to strong seat belt laws claim that not wearing a seat belt is a personal choice and affects only the individual but, in fact, motor vehicle fatalities have a significant societal cost. NHTSA calculates that the lifetime cost to society is over $977,000 per motor vehicle fatality. As of November 2018, 18 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories have primary seat belt laws covering seat belts for all portions and another 10 states include rear seats as secondary enforcement. Primary belt laws allow police to stop
and ticket a motorist for front seat violations. Secondary enforcement allows police to issue a citation only if the driver is first stopped for another infraction. The Department supports this legislation as one small way that our citizens can be protected from serious injury and death due to a serious motor vehicle accident.

**Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey, 133th Assembly District:** Rep. McCarthy strongly supports this legislation. The NTSA is one of many organizations who have documented the positive impact of requiring seat belts for all passengers in a motor vehicle including saving lives and reducing costs associated with injuries. This bill will have no fiscal impact on the citizens of our state and may provide for potential savings from injuries resulting from lack of seat belt use.

**Rep. Mitch Bolinsky, 106th Assembly District:** Rep. Bolinsky thanks the DPH for raising for consideration this very important life-saving legislation which is actually just an update to our existing law. Requiring seat belt use in all positions in a passenger vehicle has bipartisan support and will save lives without any fiscal impact to our citizens. Currently, Connecticut is one of about 20 states that do not have rear-seat occupant protections requirement. This is unfortunate since Connecticut has the highest compliance regarding front seat protection performance. Science has also shown that unrestrained rear-seat passengers who can be thrown within the vehicle can cause additional serious to other passenger, and driver injuries and fatalities. According to the NHTSA, buckled front seat passengers are 20% more likely to be fatally injured by unbuckled rear seat passengers turned into “human missiles”. Rep. Bolinsky urges the committee to move this bill forward and offers his full support.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):** CHA supports this bill and all safety initiatives that are known to reduce the risk of serious injury and death. Too often caregivers in hospital Emergency Departments treat patients as a result of both minor and serious traffic accidents. This bill would also align Connecticut statutes with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines for passenger safety, and recommends that seat belts be worn by every person in the vehicle.

**Garry Lapidus, MPH Director of the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center (CCMC):** Mr. Lapidus, along with his colleague Dr. Kevin Borrup, Associate Director of the Injury Prevention Center, strongly support this legislation. The bill would revise and upgrade Connecticut law to mandate safety belt use for all passengers in motor vehicles helping to prevent death, injury and reduce costs among Connecticut road users. Studies support that rear seat passengers are at increased risk compared to belted passengers. If there is a motor vehicle crash, unbelted rear seat passengers are more likely to be ejected from the vehicle and become a blunt moving object that can strike other passengers and result in serious harm and even death.

**John Gavallas, Chief of Police in Watertown and Chairman of the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association:** Mr. Gavallas submitted testimony on behalf of the Traffic Safety Committee of the Association in strong support of this legislation. Connecticut has one of the highest compliance rates in the nation for seat belt use. However, we only require front seat
passengers use seat belts. According to the NTSA, unrestrained back seat passengers are more likely to suffer serious injury or death in a traffic crash than occupants who are belted. Often, rear seat passengers not wearing seat belts are young people. The Association urges the committee to act on this common sense legislation.

Testimony was submitted by the following in support of this legislation for the reasons stated above:

Amy Parmenter, Manager Public and Government Affairs for the AAA.
Alec Slatky, Director, Public and Government Affairs AAA Northeast
Pina Violano Representing Yale New Haven Health System
Joy Avallone, General Counsel of the Insurance Association of Connecticut (IAC)
Julie Peters, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Alliance (BIAC)
Catherine Chase, Emergency Nurses Association, Connecticut State Council
Catherine Chase, President, Advocate for Highway and Auto Safety
Erin Collins, Assistant Vice President-State Affairs, National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies
Roberta Friedman, Chair, Advocacy Committee, CT Public Health Association
Janette Fennell, Founder and President, Kids and Cars.org.
National Transportation Safety Board

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None submitted.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza Date: March 15, 2019