

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF HB 6484, §16-17

NAME OF BILL: An Act Concerning Recommendations by the Department Of Transportation

INTRODUCED BY: Transportation Committee

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT: Consumer Reports strongly supports sections 8 and 9 of HB 6484, §16-17, legislation to require all passengers in the rear seats of any motor vehicles to wear safety belts. Unrestrained passengers are at higher risk of injury or death, no matter where they are in the vehicle, and are also more likely to become a projectile and injure others. Connecticut’s front seatbelt law has saved many lives, and we encourage legislators to build on this success and enact a mandatory rear seatbelt law.

This important bill seeks to reduce automobile fatalities and injuries by requiring passengers sitting in the rear seats of the vehicle to also wear seat belts. Under current Connecticut, all children younger than 16 years old are required to wear seat belts when riding in either the front or the back of the car, or (for younger children) to be restrained in child car seat in a rear seat. However, persons sixteen years and older who are riding in the rear seats of the vehicle are currently NOT required to wear seat belts by law.

According to research by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), increases in seat belt use played a critical role in reducing preventable fatalities and injuries in auto crashes in the period from 1960 to 2012.¹ Along with other advances in safety technology, especially airbags and energy-absorbing steering columns, NHTSA estimated that a total of 613,501 lives were saved over the 52-year period by vehicle safety standards. The NHTSA study cites state mandatory seat belt laws as playing a major contributing role in reducing preventable deaths and injuries.

As we pointed out in a recent Consumer Reports story,² when auto safety regulation started in earnest in the 1960s, the front seat was a logical place to focus. In older cars, those occupants could be hurt in a lot of different ways: impaled by the steering wheel, injured when their head hit hard interior surfaces, or ejected through the windshield. But as safety has improved dramatically for front-seat passengers over the last five decades, less attention has been given to how to make rear passengers safer. In addition, with increased use of Lyft and Uber—and ride-hailing in general—more passengers are sitting in the back.

An average of 1,799 rear-seat passengers died per year in crashes from 2009 through 2016, or about 12.5 percent of the total. That compares with an average of 19,846 per year for front-seat drivers and

¹ Kahane, C. J. (2015, January). *Lives saved by vehicle safety technologies and associated Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, 1960 to 2012 – Passenger cars and LTVs*. (Report No. DOT HS 812 069). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, available at: <https://www-esv.nhtsa.dot.gov/Proceedings/24/files/24ESV-000291.PDF>

² Plungis, J., “*The Neglected Car Backseat Is In Need of a Safety Makeover*,” Consumer Reports, April 4, 2019, available at: <https://www.consumerreports.org/car-safety/neglected-car-backseat-is-in-need-of-a-safety-makeover/>

[continued]

Memorandum of Support for HB 6484, page 2

passengers.³ A study published by the Governors Highway Safety Association estimated that of 803 rear-seat passengers who died in 2018, more than 400 crash victims could have lived if they had buckled their seat belt.⁴ According to a report published by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), unrestrained passengers in the rear seat are almost 8 times as likely to sustain a serious injury in a crash, compared to restrained rear seat occupants. Yet, the IIHS also found that 28% of adults admitted not wearing their seat belt in the rear seat all the time. And, for survey respondents who took short trips by taxi or ride-hailing services, many stated that they frequently do not wear seat belts.^{5 6}

Consumer and transportation safety advocates broadly agree, to reduce the toll of fatalities on our roads, all passengers should wear seat belts and be appropriately restrained all the time, on every single ride. Mandatory state seat belt laws have played a huge role in encouraging the use of seat belts for front-seat passengers, and this logical expansion of Connecticut's seat belt law can play a similar positive role in improving safety for rear-seat passengers of all ages.

For these reasons, Consumer Reports strongly urges you to support and vote YES for HB 6484, §16-17, to require the use of seat belts by passengers in the rear seat(s) of motor vehicles. This important consumer protection and transportation safety legislation will encourage much wider use of rear seat belts, and in so doing, prevent many needless injuries and deaths.

For more information, contact:

Chuck Bell
Programs Director, Advocacy
Consumer Reports
101 Truman Avenue
Yonkers, NY 10703-1057
www.ConsumerReports.org
(914) 378-2507 · (914) 830-0639
E-mail: chuck.bell@consumer.org

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hedlund, J. *Rear Seat Belt Use: Little Change in Four Years, Much More to Do*, Governors Highway Safety Association, October, 2019, available at: <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/RearBeltReport19>

⁵ See Janette Fennell et al., *The Center and KidsAndCars.org Sue DOT/NHTSA to Force Action on Rear Seat Belt Reminder Rule*, CENTER FOR AUTO SAFETY (Aug. 16, 2017), available at: <https://www.autosafety.org/cas-kidsandcars-org-sue-dotnhtsa-force-action-rear-seat-belt-reminder-rule/>

⁶ Jermakian, J. et al. *Factors contributing to serious and fatal injuries in belted rear-seat occupants in frontal crashes*, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, *Traffic Injury Prevention*, August 2019, available at: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/bibliography/ref/2178>