



March 3, 2021

Testimony submitted to the Connecticut State Transportation Committee

In **SUPPORT** of: HB.6484, sections 16-17

My name is Alec Slatky, Director of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Northeast. This testimony is offered on behalf of both AAA clubs in Connecticut, AAA Northeast and the AAA Allied Group, which collectively represent over a million members statewide. AAA **strongly supports the rear seat belt law** provision contained in sections 16 and 17 of HB.6484.

In 1985, Connecticut enacted one of the nation's first seatbelt laws. Since then, seatbelts have saved thousands of lives in Connecticut and hundreds of thousands of lives across the United States.

But Connecticut, once a leader in occupant protection, has fallen behind. Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia require that all back-seat passengers buckle up; in Connecticut, only those under 16 years old must do so.

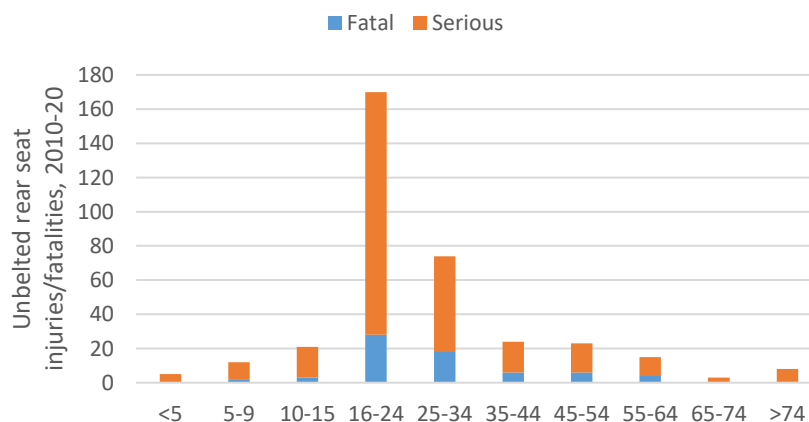
Proper restraints improve safety outcomes for all vehicle occupants, regardless of seating position or age. Compared with belted rear seat passengers, unbelted rear seat passengers are:

- 2 times more likely to be killed in a crash ([Governor's Highway Safety Association](#))
- 8 times more likely to be seriously injured in a crash ([Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#))

Education and enforcement campaigns have helped raise Connecticut's front seat belt usage rate to record highs. Unfortunately, state law prevents such initiatives from being applied to adults in the back seat, with tragic results.

According to AAA analysis of the Connecticut Crash Data Repository, **more than 60 unbelted rear seat occupants ages 16+ have been killed in Connecticut since 2010, and more than 2000 have been injured**, including at least one fatality in every county and at least one injury in more than 150 towns.

Belt usage declines once belt use is no longer required, putting young adults particularly at risk. According to a [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey](#), only 57% of young adults always buckle up in the back, compared with 89% of young drivers and 82% of young adults in the front passenger seat. And in Connecticut, unbelted rear seat passengers ages 16-24 suffered more fatalities and serious injuries last decade than all adults 25 and older:



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In AAA's view, the seat belt requirement should not expire when adolescents are most vulnerable. But older adults are also at risk. In recent years, the mathematician John Nash and his wife were killed while riding unbelted in the rear seat of a taxi, as was 60 Minutes correspondent Bob Simon. In Connecticut, the oldest unbelted rear seat belt casualty this decade was 89 years old.

When Connecticut first passed a front seatbelt law, conventional wisdom posited that adults in the back seat were not at significant risk. This assumption was unfounded: wearing a seatbelt in the back seat dramatically reduces the risk of injury. In Connecticut crashes since 2010, **41% of unbelted adult rear seat occupants were injured, compared with only 16% of belted adult rear seat occupants.**

Rear seat occupants who ride unbelted not only risk injury to themselves – they also put others in danger. **Unbelted rear seat occupants are [twice as likely](#) as those wearing seatbelts to kill a front seat passenger by becoming a projectile**, or a “back seat bullet.” Videos of [crash tests](#) and [real crashes](#) show how unbelted back seat passengers can pose dangers to other vehicle occupants.

This finding makes sense. When AAA teaches driving, whether to high school students or seniors, we advise not to leave loose objects on the back seat because they can fly forward if the brakes are applied, even at relatively slow speeds. A 15-pound backpack can do serious damage when launched at a speed of 50 miles per hour. If that object is not a 15-pound backpack but a 150-pound man, the results are much worse.

Just as wearing a seat belt is the most effective way for vehicle passengers to prevent injury, passing a seat belt law is one of the most effective ways for legislators to enhance traffic safety. After Connecticut's front seatbelt law took effect in 1986, [belt usage rates skyrocketed](#) from 11% to 69%. States with rear seatbelt laws [consistently boast higher usage](#) rates than states without rear seatbelt laws, and a [recent study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#) found that a majority of those who don't always wear their seatbelts would be more likely to buckle up if they knew there was a rear seat belt law.

Passing a rear seatbelt law will save lives and prevent injuries and AAA urges legislators to support this important proposal.

Additionally, regarding HB.6486, AAA is supportive of DOT's efforts to advance autonomous vehicle technology in Connecticut. As a member of the AV Task Force, AAA is happy to work with stakeholders to promote consumer education and traffic safety related to automated driving systems.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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