

**Testimony before the Ohio House
Transportation, Public Safety & Homeland Security Committee
in support of House Bill 320
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Good afternoon Chairman Reinhard and committee members. My name is Brian Newbacher and I'm here this morning on behalf of the Ohio Conference of AAA Clubs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill 320.

AAA works diligently to help educate motorists who transport children to use child safety seats in the safest manner possible. In fact, we conduct regular safety seat checks, as a public service, in countless Ohio communities each year.

We have also been working closely with the Ohio Children's Hospital Association, the Ohio State Highway Patrol, Safe Kids and others to form an alliance of broad-based support for this life-saving legislation. We call this partnership the "Boost Ohio Kids Coalition."

Booster seats help protect children from injury and death in crashes by ensuring that the adult seat belt fits properly. Proper fit reduces the risk of "lap belt syndrome," which occurs when the lap belt portion of the adult seat belt rides up into a child's abdomen, potentially causing internal injuries to vital organs.

According to a survey released by AAA two weeks ago to coincide with the 30th anniversary of Tennessee's first-in-the-nation child safety seat law, more than half of all parents (54 percent) look to their state law for guidance on how to restrain their children.

While a strong majority (93 percent) of parents surveyed said they are aware of their state's child restraint, less than half (39 percent) can accurately identify the age at which their state allows a child to ride in an automobile with only a lap and shoulder belt.

These results send a clear message: Stronger laws and better education will save additional young lives and prevent serious injuries. So just how big is the problem in Ohio in terms of raw numbers?

In a recent five-year-period in Ohio, from 2002 to 2006, motor vehicle crashes killed 176 children ages 4-8 and injured more than 18,000 (18,396) in the same age group, according to the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

The rationale behind stepping up and reversing these numbers is that the effectiveness of booster seats in protecting children from serious crash-related injuries is well documented.

For example, a study by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (Dr.'s Durbin, Winston, as published in JAMA, June 4, 2003) reported that booster seats reduced the odds of sustaining significant injuries in a crash by 59 percent (of children ages 4-7 in 15 states). Booster seats were especially effective in reducing injuries to the abdomen, neck, spine, back, and lower extremities.

All too often, children over the age of 4 prematurely graduate to the manufacturer-installed safety belts. These are systems that are designed and tested for 168-pound adult males.

While the mismatch of a small child to an adult lap or lap and shoulder belt is obvious to the trained eye, parents and caregivers cannot be entirely faulted for bypassing the booster seat stage.

As I suggested earlier, parents often look to laws for guidance on how best to protect their children in a vehicle. The lack of widespread and well-funded educational efforts, coupled with a state law that provides only minimal coverage for children over the age of four, creates a false sense of security for many parents. They believe they're transporting their children in the safest manner possible—when in fact—they are not.

AAA's Child Passenger Safety Technicians have seen first hand thousands of situations where a child is placed in a seat belt too early.

A booster seat raises the child so that the vehicle's lap and shoulder belts fit properly. The lap portion fits snug across the hips and the shoulder belt angles across the shoulder and chest. This simple and relatively inexpensive solution saves lives and reduces injuries.

For the first time since booster seat laws were enacted, there is finally research that proved what we all assumed – booster seat laws are effective. A recent study by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia shows that children (aged 4 through 7) in states with booster seat laws are 39 percent more likely to be appropriately restrained in a booster seat or child safety seat than children in states without such laws.

There's also an economic incentive to support this legislation. The federal transportation reauthorization of 2005, SAFETEA-LU, provides Child Passenger Safety grants to states that enact and enforce primary booster seat laws.

It's my understanding that \$1.35 million would be available to Ohio if a booster seat law were enacted. Up to 50 percent of those funds could be used for low-income eligible families to pay for as many as 25,000 booster seats.

States receiving grants can use the funds for education, enforcement and training activities, as well as to purchase and distribute booster seats to low-income families. AAA was a strong advocate for including the CPS grants in the transportation bill.

House Bill 320 appears to be consistent with federal recommendations and represents great progress in child passenger safety. AAA commends Representative Shannon Jones for her leadership and concern for traffic safety.

With 38 states already having at least some type of booster seat law in place to protect older children in vehicles, let's make Ohio the 39th. I encourage this committee to vote in favor of HB 320.

I will be happy to answer any questions or feel free to call on us at your convenience. Thank you.