



August 30, 2017

The Honorable Phil Scott
Governor
State of Vermont
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, Vermont 05609

Dear Governor Scott,

As representatives of the leading highway safety organizations, we appreciate that you have signaled support for legislation to upgrade Vermont’s seat belt law. The proposed change would help to ensure that everyone buckles up on every trip by giving law enforcement the capacity to effectively enforce the law. In early August, eight people tragically died in motor vehicle crashes in Vermont. Seven of them were not wearing a seat belt. Passage of a primary enforcement seat belt law for all occupants is critical to reducing preventable fatalities and improving public safety in Vermont.

We have known for many years that wearing a seat belt can reduce your chance of dying in a car crash by 45 percent and of serious injury by 50 percent.¹ This is why 34 states have passed primary seat belt laws including Maine, Connecticut and Rhode Island. In 2015, Rhode Island had one of the lowest motor vehicle crash death rates in the country with 3.5 occupant deaths per 100,000 people. In the same year, Vermont’s crash death rate was more than double that, 7.7 occupant deaths per 100,000 people.²

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 2016, the average seat belt use rate in states without primary enforcement laws was 83 percent and in the states with primary enforcement laws was 92 percent.³ According to NHTSA in 2016, the seat belt use rate was 80 percent in Vermont, twelve percent below the national average of states with primary enforcement laws.

The effort to pass a primary enforcement law comes at a critical time. Traffic fatalities in Vermont peaked in early August reaching the highest number to date since 2012, mirroring the rise in traffic fatalities across the nation.⁴ Overall deaths on our nation’s roadways have dramatically increased over the past two years. According to NHTSA, there was a 7.2 percent increase in road fatalities in 2015.⁵ This increase reversed a 30-year trend of decreasing motor vehicle crash fatalities.

Vermont already requires drivers and passengers over eighteen to wear a seat belt. This legislation would give the Vermont law enforcement community the clarity it needs to effectively enforce the law. We thank you for your consideration of this sensible change in the law.

Sincerely,

Torine Creppy
Interim President
Safe Kids Worldwide

Deborah A.P. Hersman
President & CEO
National Safety Council

Jacqueline S. Gillan
President
Advocates for Highway and
Auto Safety

Natalie Draisin
Director & UN Representative
#SaveKidsLives
FIA Foundation, North America

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- ¹ Pickrell, T. M., & Li, R. (2016, November). Seat Belt Use in 2016—Overall Results (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 812 351). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- ² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, NCSA Data Resource Website. Fatality Analysis Reporting System Encyclopedia. Accessed August 15, 2017.
Available at <http://www.fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/QueryTool/QuerySection/SelectYear.aspx>. Codes used were Person type 1: Driver of a MV In-Transport, 2: Passenger of a MV In-Transport, 9: Unknown Occupant Type in a MV In-Transport; Injury severity type 4: fatal injury (K); All ages.
- ³ Pickrell, T. M., & Li, R. (2016, November). Seat Belt Use in 2016—Overall Results (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 812 351). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ⁴ Murray, E (2017, August 8). Vermont Police: Summer crashes tend to be more severe. Burlington Free Press. Retrieved from <http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com>
- ⁵ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2016, August). 2015 motor vehicle crashes: Overview. (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 812 318). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.