

**Before the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
B22-0661 the Rear-Facing Car Seat Safety Amendment Act of 2018
July 6, 2018
Statement of Safe Kids Worldwide President
Torine Creppy**

Chairwoman Cheh, we thank you for convening this hearing on this vital child safety legislation, the *Rear-Facing Car Seat Safety Amendment Act of 2018*, and also to Councilmembers Todd, Bonds and Nadeau for your co-sponsorship of B22-0661.

Introduction

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about this important legislation. I am Torine Creppy, President of Safe Kids Worldwide. I was recently named President in March 2018, and I have worked at Safe Kids for 19 years. I grew up in the District, where I lived in Congress Heights, Ward 8. Today, I live in Prince Georges County with my husband Pascal and our son Justin who is now 10 years old.

Safe Kids is a grass roots network with more than 400 coalitions around the nation, including Safe Kids DC. Both Safe Kids Worldwide and the local coalition are led by Children's National Health System (CNHS). Just last week, CNHS was rated one of the top ten pediatric institutions in the U.S., number five to be exact, by U.S. News and World Report. Parents like myself are so fortunate to be able to rely on such a strong health care system for our kids.

Importance of Child Restraints; Buckle-Up Program

I have directed the child passenger safety aspect of the "Safe Kids Buckle Up" program since its inception in 1997. It is one of the most successful behavior change campaigns with a public health focus. We work on a range of issues confronting kids and their parents. We seek to be your go-to place involving kids in and around cars, at home and at play. And the heart and soul of what we do involves child passenger safety. We conduct our work on child passenger safety in collaboration with our longstanding partner General Motors.

At car seat checkup events and inspection stations we have checked and documented more than 2.2 million car seat interventions. Each car seat inspected represents a child who left our events safer than when they arrived. We are designated by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) to train and certify child passenger safety technicians, and there are close to 42,000 of them at work today. More than 161,000 have been certified since the program began in 1998. Safe Kids Buckle-Up has:

- Conducted more than 80,000 car seat checks.
- Provided more than 550,000 car seats to at-risk families, many at low or no cost through the NAACP and the National Council of La Raza
- Provided awareness to more than 22 million people to the program's events and outreach activities.

Our car seat check-up work is important because car seats and motor vehicles are the result of ever-developing and complex engineering. Parents need help. They need assistance adjusting and readjusting

their car seats frequently as their child grows taller, heavier and developmentally over time. Conservatively, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that 46 percent of car seats are installed incorrectly.¹ There are other studies which show that the car seat misuse rate is larger, with one study reporting that serious car safety seat misuse occurred for 91% of all infants.² In a crash, a child who is unrestrained is at serious risk. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 34% of child occupant deaths involved children entirely unrestrained.³

Safe Kids DC is ready and prepared to serve the District's parents by checking children in their car seats for safety. We can also work with you to set up a car seat inspection event in your district or where you think there's need for one here in DC.

In addition to the inspections and training work we do, we also engage in persistent awareness efforts to help parents know the best practices for keeping their children safer. For example, in 2016 we created an on-line tool which a parent can use to meet the car seat challenge—the first question it asks is your child's age and weight. The Ultimate Car Seat Guide answers questions like: What's the right car seat for my child? When should I change the direction of the car seat?⁴ It is available in Spanish and has been carefully reviewed by a plain language specialist. Many pictures and videos guide the caregiver to a safe conclusion targeted to their child's age, weight and development.

We also advocate for laws and regulations to prevent childhood injury. Common sense, evidence-based laws have been an effective tool to help families and communities change behaviors to protect their kids -- we have seen this with car seat and booster seat laws across the country.

Legislation requiring rear-facing placement has been adopted in 11 other states, most recently our neighbor Virginia.⁵ In addition, in this session of the legislature, another 11 states considered rear facing legislation.⁶

Importance of Rear-Facing Position

As a child grows, they and their parents go through three types of car seats until they are taller than 4 feet, 9 inches and are ready to be tested for adult seat belt fit. The first three stages of car seat safety are rear- facing, forward- facing and belt- positioning- booster seats.

Today, we are talking about the first phase. The reason we urge parents to keep children in rear-facing car seats is very simple. When a child is born, they have a large head in proportion to the rest of their body, and they continue to have a heavy head through the first several years of their life. Additionally, their neck and skeleton are still developing and thus cannot support a heavy head and weak neck from the force of a crash.

Based on this fact of a young life, evidence tells us a rear-facing child safety seat does an effective job of supporting the head, neck and spine of infants and toddlers in a crash. That is because it distributes the force of the collision over a large part of the body. The goal of the chairwoman's bill is to put that fact into practice to protect a young child in the event of a crash.

The standard embraced in the bill we are speaking about today is what we teach the technicians we train and certify—all 42,000 of them—and how they help parents learn to correctly install seats in cars. This is what we have taught since the guideline was set by the American Academy of Pediatrics. We began to teach the course in 1998 after NHTSA standardized basic child passenger safety information

based on research and science. The course is rigorous with written and hands-on tests and is seen as a valued continuing education component for police officers, EMS, advocates, nurses, doctors and other health and safety professionals. To date, two NHTSA administrators, the head of the NTSB and many other respected community leaders have taken this course. I invite you or someone from your office to join us in a class. We can never have too many technicians in the District. The basic rule is that we need to keep kids in a rear-facing position for as long as possible, until they outgrow their rear-facing car seats. Many kids will be 2 or more years of age and still able to get the maximum protection. *Two years is a guideline, not a deadline.* It's important to remember that a child should remain rear facing based on the guidelines of the car seat manufacturer, which can be found on every car seat.

A study released this Spring further supports the efficacy of the rear-facing guidelines. While it is widely believed that the rear-facing position is effective in front and side crashes, the study found that rear-facing positioning is effective in rear-end crashes.⁷

The guideline to keep a child rear facing runs counter to a parent's intuition. I remember one parent telling me, "I wanted him to be more interactive with me when he was in the car. I felt kind of disconnected with him facing the opposite way." Moreover, placing a child without being able to see their parent can be more challenging—I am talking about crying and kicking. One of the primary benefits of this bill will be to help parents recognize the importance of staying rear facing as long as possible, and we know that common sense, evidence-based laws are the most effective tool we have for changing behavior in injury prevention.

The Challenge of Road Safety and Children Today

Let me tell you a brief story about a Washington, DC mother, Britney Williams and her daughter Dakota. Just before Dakota was born, Britney went to get information from Safe Kids DC about using a car seat correctly. DC police officer Arlinda Page, trained as a technician, showed her how to properly install the new seat in the rear-facing position. Then, when Dakota was just four months old and still vulnerable, her mother's car was rear-ended. Britney's first thought was of Dakota. She turned around and Dakota was fine—she remained perfectly positioned and continued babbling away. Britney knows the result could have been dramatically different without a correctly installed car seat.

The job of protecting kids in and around cars remains as important than ever. Between 1994 and 2016, there has been a 51 percent decrease in the number of MVC occupant deaths and a 55 percent reduction in the fatality rate.⁸

However, since 2013 the annual number and rate have been increasing. There was a 7.2 percent increase between 2014 and 2015 which represents the largest percentage increase in close to 50 years.⁹ This is the case for children as well. The increase is even larger for children in their car seat years, under age 8; there has been a 19 percent increase between 2014-2016.¹⁰

But there's one data point that's more important than any. One child's life lost to a preventable injury is one too many. I have met so many parents who have lost children to a preventable injury. They are guilt-ridden and are heart-broken. They know their child would be with us today if they had done just one thing differently: buckled up the car seat even though it was a quick trip to the supermarket; looked behind more closely before backing up; letting the cell phone ring while driving instead of picking it up.

Together, we need to work to protect each child from a preventable injury, one ride at a time, one correctly installed car seat at a time.

This bill strives to fulfill that mission we share today. This should be the rule in every home and every car with small kids and it should be the law in our nation's capital.

Thank you Madame Chairwoman Cheh and members of the Council, including my Leadership Greater Washington fellow graduate Brandon Todd.

Contact: Anthony Green, Director, Public Policy, Safe Kids Worldwide, 202.662.0606, agreen@safekids.org

¹ Greenwell, N. K. (2015). Results of the National Child Restraint Use Special Study. *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*. Available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812142>.

² Hoffman B, Gallardo A, Carlson K. "Unsafe from the Start: Serious Misuse of Car Safety Seats at Newborn Discharge." *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 2015; DOI: [10.1016/j.jpeds.2015.11.047](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2015.11.047) Available at <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/12/151218084323.htm>

³ Morbidity and Mortality Report, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 2016. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6536a6.htm>.

⁴ The Ultimate Car Seat Guide, <https://www.safekids.org/ultimate-car-seat-guide/>; In Spanish, <https://www.safekids.org/ultimate-car-seat-guide/es/>

⁵ New Jersey, California, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York (effective November 1, 2019) Nebraska (effective January 1, 2019) and Virginia.

⁶ Washington State, Arizona, Texas, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Massachusetts, Delaware and Maryland.

⁷ Mansfield J, "Safety of rear-facing car seats in rear impact car crashes." *ScienceDaily*. April 3, 2018. The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center. Available at <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/04/180403085051.htm>

⁸ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, NCSA Data Resource Website. Fatality Analysis Reporting System Encyclopedia (FARS). Washington, D.C. Accessed: March 15, 2018. Available from: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/researchdata/fatality-analysis-reporting-system-fars> [Search criteria: Person type 1,2,9; Injury severity 4; Ages 0-19 years; Years 1994-2016]

⁹ Traffic Safety Facts, 2015 Motor Vehicle Crashes: Overview, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, August 2016. Available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812318>.

¹⁰ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, NCSA Data Resource Website. Fatality Analysis Reporting System Encyclopedia (FARS). Washington, D.C. Accessed: March 15, 2018. Available at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/researchdata/fatality-analysis-reporting-system-fars>