



**Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
U.S. House of Representatives
Examining Equity in Transportation Safety Enforcement
Testimony of Torine Creppy, President, Safe Kids Worldwide
Wednesday, February 24, 2022**

Chairman DeFazio, Chairwoman Holmes Norton, and Ranking Members Graves and Davis, thank you for your leadership in holding this hearing on equity in transportation policy. Achieving equity in transportation is a priority for the Biden Administration. Secretary Pete Buttigieg has indicated his desire to work with Congress and stakeholders like Safe Kids Worldwide to ensure everyone is represented on these important issues. Thank you for your commitment to it as well.

Although enforcement is at the center of today's timely and important hearing, it represents only one facet of equitable transportation policy. Smart, fair laws must be the forerunner of fair and effective enforcement. Our mission is focused on children, and the following testimony highlights some of the most critical equity issues American kids face in terms of safety on the road. These are issues falling squarely within the committee's jurisdiction and we thank the committee leadership and members for their consideration.

Safe Kids Worldwide was founded in 1988 and is dedicated to reducing unintentional injuries and death involving children 19 and under, the number one cause of death of Americans in this age group. Furthermore, the leading cause of these tragic deaths are road fatalities occurring in and around cars. Because almost all of these deaths are preventable, they are all the more tragic.

Over the past two years we have put forward ideas on how to improve federal law that is backed by research and data. We believe they can lead to significant progress in protecting our children in cars, and on foot or bikes. We were pleased that many of the provisions we sought were included in the Surface Transportation bill passed by this committee and the full House.

By addressing equity in transportation safety, we can meet the challenge of reaching zero road deaths by 2050. Transportation equity includes safety for all age groups. We can leave no one behind. The kids we work for at Safe Kids have no voice and so we must speak for them—and act—both NGOs like ours and policymakers like you.

Safe Kids has two priorities in addressing transportation equity:

- Bringing Robust Child Passenger Safety Programs to Underserved Communities
- Resolving Safety Disparities in Bicycle, Pedestrian, and School Zone Safety

In addition, motor vehicle laws must be enforced in a fair and equitable way. This is fundamentally important.

At Safe Kids, the foundation for our work is evidence. The evidence clearly shows that there is inequity in transportation experienced by children and the consequences for children are serious.

- The death rate per 100,000 is more than twice as high for African-American children (2.17) compared to Hispanic (1.07) or white children (1.06).¹
- The death rate per 100,000 is more than four times as high for American Indian/Alaskan Native children (4.74) compared to Hispanic (1.07) or white children (1.06).²
- Almost twice as many African-American (45 percent) and Hispanic children (46 percent) who died in 2009-2010 crashes were not buckled up compared to white children (26 percent).³

“It’s the One Thing You Buy Designed Specifically to Save Your Child’s Life”

In addition to the data, there are hundreds of stories about the consequences when a child is not in a car seat or when a seat is installed incorrectly. There are also stories about how car seats save lives, like this one. Here’s one example: It involves a crash that happened in December 2018 in Spokane, Washington. On a snowy day, Anna Kenney was driving northbound on Highway 395, south of Loon Lake with her 1-year-old granddaughter Joy. She lost control of her Toyota pickup and crossed the center line. She hit two vehicles moving in the opposite direction. The three vehicles were mangled together in the crash. Ms. Kenney was not buckled up and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Joy was strapped into a car seat in the rear seat of the pickup. Her car seat was ejected from the vehicle, landing on debris on the shoulder of the road about 60 yards away from the pickup. Joy was found uninjured. In a Facebook posting, Joy’s mom wrote, a car seat is “the one thing you buy designed specifically to save your child’s life. Joy is still here because of a car seat, for that I will be eternally grateful.”⁴

Building an Effective Child Passenger Safety Program in Underserved Communities

Issues affecting children include lack of access to life-saving car seats in high-risk communities and the availability of child passenger technicians who can help parents install car seats correctly. This is important because estimates of car seat misuse (and nonuse) range from 46 percent to 61 percent.⁵ Further, an incorrectly installed child restraint can be less effective and, in some cases, deadly. When used for every ride and properly installed, child safety seats can reduce the risk of fatal injury by up to 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers (ages 1 to 4).⁶

A 2018 technical paper by AAP describes the stark road safety disparities faced by underserved communities, particularly children of color. African-American, American Indian and Alaskan Native children experience significantly higher mortality rates on the road than their white, Asian American or Pacific Islander counterparts. The AAP attributes these gaps in large part from fewer children in restraints. AAP says this calls for “more culturally sensitive intervention programs” which have been associated with achieving increased restraint use among target populations.⁶

Safe Kids applauds the leadership of this committee and Rep. Dina Titus for including changes to Section 405 to establish a program to provide child safety seat education and outreach and child safety seats to low-income families and underserved populations. This language was supported by other important highway safety groups and we encourage the committee to include this provision in future legislation.

Examining Safety Disparities in Other Ways the Children Travel

Going beyond children at risk in and around cars, we must think about other ways in which transportation is regulated by government—or should be—and results in a distinction in the way children are protected based on race, income, choice of a place to live such as urban vs. rural. One example involves Native American children. A 2019 study by the University of Minnesota concluded that Native Americans are five

times more likely than white people to be killed while on foot. The researchers who conducted the study heard from Native American parents who said they “avoid sending their children out to walk or bicycle because there is no safe shoulder or sidewalk for them.”⁷

Further, African-American children are twice as likely to be killed as pedestrians than their white counterparts, and Latino children are 40 percent more likely. And, data tells us there is inequity in the way infrastructure is planned. In high income communities, 90 percent have sidewalks which children can use as their route to school compared to only 49 percent of low-income communities.⁸

There are other issues we must think about:

- Are protected bike lanes and other measures to make bicycling planned in an equitable manner?
- Are traffic patterns in dense low-income neighborhoods more perilous?
- Are there resources to make walking and biking safer in rural areas—where, for example, children must wait for school buses on unpaved roadways--and where speed is also a factor?
- Can less resourced school districts make school bus transportation safer with safety belts on new buses and drop arm cameras to discourage school bus passing?

What Can We Do?

Based on the foregoing, Safe Kids is recommending the following:

- Education and discounted/free car seats for **underserved communities** to eliminate the disproportionate rates of nonuse/misuse of car seats and crashes among higher risk populations;
- Greater **support for CPS inspection stations** to reduce nonuse and incorrect use, especially in underserved communities;
- Recruit, train and continually educate **CPS technicians** and instructors in and for underserved communities;⁹
- Passage, implementation, and enforcement of **more consistent state child restraint state legislation** through incentives;
- Incentivize states to make CPS a greater priority **through a performance standard** unique to child passenger safety;
- Increased **pediatric heatstroke** awareness efforts in light of 100 kids dying in hot cars in the two years (the highest number of deaths on record) prior to 2020’s COVID pandemic, and use of technology to remind parents and caregivers to look for a child;
- Strongly support and build programs such as **Safe Routes to School** and similar measures involving access to parks. Not only can we raise safe children but also healthier ones;
- Support **Complete Streets** policies and **infrastructure improvements** which foster walking and biking such as protected bike lanes, enhanced signalization, and paved paths for rural children to walk to school or wait for school buses;
- While **school buses** remain the safest way for a child to get to school, we must reduce the school bus passing danger and commit to providing safety belts in school buses.

Conclusion

Safe Kids commends the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for holding this hearing. Equity in transportation will ensure that every child has the opportunity to safely travel to their destination whether it is to work, school, a park or other locations. Further, it will help us reach the vision of **zero** road deaths by 2050. As stated earlier, our policy can leave no one behind.

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Safe Kids Intern Taylor Savage, a senior at Old Dominion University, conducted research for this testimony.

References

¹ Data on children killed as occupants in motor vehicle crashes as well as data on restraint use were obtained from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Fatality and Injury Reporting System Tool (FIRST). Years selected were 2009–2013 combined and 2014–2018 combined. Age ranges selected were 0–8, 0–13 and 13–19.

² Data on children killed as occupants in motor vehicle crashes as well as data on restraint use were obtained from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Fatality and Injury Reporting System Tool (FIRST). Years selected were 2009–2013 combined and 2014–2018 combined. Age ranges selected were 0–8, 0–13 and 13–19.

³ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention. (2020, February 4). Child Passenger Safety. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/childpassengersafety/index.html>

⁴ Howell, C [Catherine]. (2020, December 11). [Facebook Status Update]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/catherine.kenney2>

⁵ Greenwell, N. K. (2015, May). Results of the national child restraint use special study. (Report No. DOT HS 812 142). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Available at: <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812142>

⁶ Durbin, D.R.; Hoffman, B.D.; Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention. (November 2018). Child Passenger Safety. *Pediatrics*. Volume 142(5). Available at: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/5/e20182461>

⁷ Schmitt, A. (2019, February 20). Native American Pedestrians Have Highest Death Rate. *Streetsblog USA*. Available at: <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2019/02/20/native-american-pedestrians-have-highest-death-rate/>.

⁸ Safe Routes to School National Partnership. *Equity in Safe Routes to School*. Accessed January 19, 2020. Available at: <https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/safe-routes-school/101/equity>

⁹ Parents are more prone to have their child's child passenger system check-up by a certified technician when the technician resides in their community.