



Statement of Kate Carr
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Before the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Improving the Effectiveness of the Federal Surface
Transportation Safety Grant Programs
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Introduction: Thank you for holding this important hearing and for enabling Safe Kids Worldwide to submit written testimony for the record.

Safe Kids Worldwide was founded by Dr. Martin Eichelberg in 1988 by a pediatric surgeon from Children’s National Health Center in Washington, DC who saw all too many injuries—preventable injuries--in the emergency room. The organization was formed with a singular mission: to dramatically decrease the rate of preventable injuries, then and now the leading killer of kids under 19. Safe Kids has been part of a movement that has resulted in a 55% decrease in deaths due to preventable injuries. Today the organization brings together 600 coalitions based in communities around the United States and 27 partner organizations in countries around the world.

Safe Kids works on risks to children involving unintentional injury ranging from medication poisoning to window falls, sports injuries and motor vehicle crashes, and more. Incidents involving motor vehicles cause the greatest number of deaths and injuries, though significant progress has been made. The number of children dying in car crashes has declined by 58 % since 1987. Our efforts on awareness, education and public policy are evidence based and driven by primary and secondary research and data.

We know that the role of laws, regulation and policy innovation is a game changer when it comes to child safety, especially involving motor vehicle crashes. The impact of the requirements involving the use of seat belts and child restraint systems are just two examples of tremendous success.

We applaud the committee on its work because MAP-21 embraced a relatively new set of interventions which we believe will have significant impact. In this statement, we will address

aspects of the law in which we see the room for improvement in the next authorization bill and several other areas in which legislation can address safety. Some of the innovations embrace technology and others are driven by common sense like enforcing neighborhood appropriate speed limits where kids play and around their schools.

Sammy's Story: Recently *The New York Times* told the story of a tragedy which involved 12-year-old Sammy Eckstein of Brooklyn. But Sammy's story is all too common and could just as easily have occurred in Milwaukee or a rural area in Minnesota, in Orlando or Oregon. Sammy was waiting in front of his family's home for his to go to soccer practice together. The ball he was playing with went into the street and, with the light halting traffic at the closest intersection, he went into the street to get it. But he tripped on his cleats and a van hit him. Sammy died from the injuries. His mother and father have become vigilant about road safety in their neighborhood and beyond. Sammy's mom has used a radar gun to track drivers moving significantly faster than the speed limit and has witnessed many running the red light.

On Sammy's behalf and for the average 593 children who die each year in pedestrian incidents, we can and must do better.

Teen Driving, and Graduated Driver's License Laws: The data tells a disturbing story. Motor vehicle crashes are the number one killer of our teenagers. The fatal crash rate per mile driven for 16-19 year-olds is nearly 3 times the rate for drivers ages 20 and over. There has been progress over time: In 2012, 2,823 teenagers aged 13-19 died in motor vehicle crashes, which is 68% fewer than died in 1975. In that time, states adopted the three-tiered system for new drivers to obtain their licenses, but the GDL laws differ in terms of their seriousness. The key differences are: At what age can one receive a learner's permit and license? When can a new teen driver drive at night? How many passengers can be in the car with a new driver? What kind of training must a new teen driver undergo?

The most comprehensive GDL programs are associated with reductions of 38% to 40% in fatal and injury crashes, respectively, among 16-year-old drivers. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety created a useful tool that evaluates how many lives can be saved by instituting GDL elements.

Recognizing this, MAP-21 sought to raise the level of effectiveness with an incentive grant program. To win such a grant, the states' laws must meet criteria which are stringent under the law. Thus far, no state has been able to qualify for a GDL grant. Safe Kids believes that the Committee should reevaluate the criteria required for a state to receive a grant, without reducing the effectiveness of the laws. Among others, serious restrictions for night-time driving and passenger occupancy are important elements of a strong GDL law. The law should give NHTSA greater flexibility to grant waivers to states which have been conscientious in passing and enforcing their GDL laws.

Pre-driver Programs: The path to full license privileges that GDL laws create is an important one. Safe Kids believes that the education process should begin earlier than when a prospective driver is ready to obtain a learner's permit. Heightened efforts to engage pre-drivers in safety education, we believe, would be helpful in dealing with the teen driver challenge. Approaches include agreements between parents and prospective drivers which involve rewards and sanctions on both sides of the "contract" and peer-based education. It would be helpful to clarify whether existing funding in

Section 402 or 405 allows a state to adopt such a program for pre-drivers or whether language is needed in the next authorization to allow states to do so.

Child Restraint Systems: Consistent, Correct Usage and Availability. When installed and used correctly, there is no question that child safety seats and safety belts can prevent injuries and save lives. Child safety seats can reduce fatal injury by up to 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers (ages 1 to 4). A critical part of our work has been encouraging the use of car seats and helping parents install them correctly. Thus, we have developed a recognized expertise in this area.

Safe Kids believes that a child must be restrained in a car based on their age and weight every time. Of children who died in auto crashes in 2011, 33% were not buckled up. In 2013, Safe Kids conducted a survey of 1,000 parents and determined that car seat use is not at all universal for every drive, every time. For example, 1 in 3 parents told us that it is acceptable to leave a child unrestrained for a short ride, even though 60% of crashes involving children occur 10 minutes or less from home. Younger parents said that it is acceptable to ride with children unrestrained when traveling overnight. Moreover, child restraints are misused 73% of the time in critical ways.

Based on the foregoing, Safe Kids sees an imperative for states to renew a commitment to awareness and enforcement. Our 2013 study suggests that public recognition of the need to keep kids in child safety seats and buckled up may have diminished. A model for such efforts is the “Click It or Ticket” high-visibility campaign mounted around the Memorial Day holiday. Funds in the occupant safety grant program can and should be used for this purpose, and states should be encouraged to do so.

Safe Kids commends the Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, as well as industry, for their continued commitment to making car seats safer, adapting cars for the use of child restraints and keeping the public aware of child restraint issues and what seat would work best with their automobile.

Distraction: On Foot, Behind the Wheel: Considerable attention has been paid to the use of electronic equipment on the part of drivers, especially those texting. For teenage drivers, the elements of GDL laws pertaining to cell phone use and texting are important. It was right that MAP-21 included those bans as criteria for receiving those grant funds. Drivers climbing the GDL slope are not as skilled and we urge state lawmakers to include those bans in efforts to improve GDL laws. As with the GDL incentive grant program, the distraction grant program should be reevaluated to enable diligent states to qualify for these funds that would fund enforcement and awareness efforts.

However, distraction is also a factor putting pedestrians at risks. Safe Kids, with 24 of its coalitions participating, conducted an observational survey of 34,325 middle and high school students crossing a street in a school zone. One in five high school students were observed crossing the street wearing headphones or texting, and middle school students were similarly observed at a rate of one in eight. Two in five of the older kids were texting.

Many in the child safety education field were disappointed that MAP-21 combined the Safe Routes to School program into another grant with less funds. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is an important

program with proven results. In New York City, a study found that the rate of child pedestrian injuries during school hours fell by around 44% following the introduction of infrastructure improvements to reduce speed and make pedestrian routes more sensible. The California Department of Transportation estimated that the safety benefit of SRTS was up to a 49% decrease in childhood bicycle and pedestrian collision rates, while, at the same time, walking and biking has increased in the range of 20 to 200 percent. Thus, SRTS investments are a win-win, encouraging fitness and improving safety

We hope that the Committee will seriously evaluate whether the change in Safe Routes to Schools' funding status has negatively impacted its effectiveness.

Heatstroke: A motor vehicle can heat up by 19 degrees in just ten minutes. At least 605 children have died in vehicles from hyperthermia since 1998. In 2013, 43 children died in this way. This loss of young life calls for an intense, multi-year program to provide awareness of this danger. Until there is a proven technological way to prevent these tragic deaths, building awareness is our most reliable tool. NHTSA has been a leader in this effort; its work on hyperthermia should be embraced in the authorization law.

Impaired Driving: Safe Kids is strongly supportive of the efforts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving in pressing for strong measures to reduce impaired driving and appreciates the work of the Committee in embracing the impaired driving incentive grant with the dollars it deserves to be effective. As with other programs in MAP-21, the next authorization bill should consider how the grant program can be amended to make it truly effective for states that adopt and strengthen ignition interlock brake laws. In addition, GDL laws should be tough when novice and intermediate drivers violate state drunk driving laws.

Other Issues Important to Child Safety: Safe Kids strongly favors mandatory helmet laws for motorcycle drivers and passengers. Safe Kids has been involved in several states in which efforts were made to repeal those laws. The committee should seriously consider the implications for a state that does so. Also, Safe Kids agrees with many in the transportation policy community that a longer term authorization bill should pass the Congress. This will give the states the time and focus they need to effectively implement programs and give the Committee more time to thoroughly evaluate programs.

Safe Kids appreciates this opportunity to be heard on issues vital to keeping our kids safe on the road and in motor vehicles.

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