



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



January 23, 2018

The Honorable Vicki Marble
Chair
State, Veterans, and Military
Affairs Committee
Colorado Senate
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80203

The Honorable Jerry Sonnenberg
Vice Chair
State, Veterans, and Military
Affairs Committee
Colorado Senate
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Chairwoman Marble and Vice Chairman Sonnenberg:

As representatives of leading public health and safety organizations working to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries and contain crash costs, we urge you to support Senate Bill (SB) 53. This lifesaving legislation will upgrade Colorado’s seat belt law by requiring all occupants to buckle up on every trip. It will also empower law enforcement to issue citations without having to first observe an additional offense.

In 2016, 608 people were killed in traffic crashes in Colorado, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Traffic fatalities have increased five consecutive years in the state, totaling a 27 percent increase since 2011 (NHTSA). This upward spike continued its trajectory in 2017. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) noted fatalities in 2017 surpassed 2016 with 629 killed on the state’s roads. Moreover, 53 percent of the passenger vehicle occupants killed in 2016 were unrestrained, when restraint use was known (NHTSA). Over the ten-year period of 2007 to 2016, motor vehicle crashes claimed the lives of 5,057 people on Colorado roads (NHTSA). By any measure, this is a public health epidemic in urgent need of the remedy that SB 53 provides.

States with primary enforcement laws have higher seat belt use rates. A study conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) found that when states strengthen their laws from secondary to primary enforcement, driver death rates decline by an estimated seven percent. Moreover, a recent IIHS poll found that nearly 40 percent of people surveyed said they sometimes don't buckle up in the rear seat because there is no law requiring it. If such a law existed, 60 percent of poll respondents said it would convince them to use seat belts in the back seat.

Seat belts not only save lives and prevent lifelong debilitating injuries, they also save taxpayer dollars. Motor vehicle crashes cost Colorado over \$4.1 billion annually (NHTSA). Unbelted crash victims have medical bills that are 55 percent higher than belted victims, and society bears a majority of the cost through increased insurance premiums, taxes and health care costs (NHTSA). If every state with a secondary seat belt law upgraded to primary enforcement, about 1,000 lives and \$4 billion (2005 US\$) in crash costs could be saved every year (NHTSA).

Seat belts saved the lives of 209 people on Colorado roads in 2016, and yet 58 more people could have been saved by 100 percent seat belt use (NHTSA). We urge the Committee to advance this commonsense legislation to save lives, prevent injuries, and curb the expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Knight, MD, FACS
President, Colorado Chapter
American College of Surgeons

Jean Schuppe MSN, RN, CEN
Colorado State President
Emergency Nurses Association

Julie A. Dunn, MD, MS, FACS
Medical Director of Trauma Research
UCHealth North Medical Center of the Rockies
Chair, Colorado Committee on Trauma

Catherine Chase
President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Janette E. Fennell
President
KidsAndCars.org

cc: State, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committee Members