



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



#SaveKidsLives

May 31, 2016

The Honorable Joseph E. Robach
Chair
New York State Senate
Committee on Transportation
Legislative Office Building, Room 804
Albany, New York 12248

The Honorable Carl L. Marcellino
Co-Chair
New York State Senate
Committee on Transportation
Legislative Office Building, Room 804
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Chairman Robach and Co-Chairman Marcellino:

As leading safety organizations working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent unnecessary crashes, deaths and injuries, and contain costs, we support enactment of Assembly Bill (A) 9594 and Senate Bill (S) 7631. This legislation would strengthen New York's child occupant protection statute by requiring that children remain rear facing in a child safety seat until age two or 30 pounds. Research and recommendations by leading safety groups—including the American Academy of Pediatrics—strongly encourage keeping children rear facing past age one to allow them to reach an appropriate level of physical development before turning the seat forward facing. When children are properly restrained in a child safety seat that is appropriate for their age and size, their chance of being killed or seriously injured in a car crash is greatly reduced.

New York has a long history of enacting highway safety laws. Thirty-two years ago, New York became the first state in the nation to require the use of seat belts for drivers and front seat passengers. Since that time, New York has continued to improve its highway safety laws including passing a booster seat requirement to upgrade child passenger safety. Keeping children rear facing longer is an appropriate next step based on sound research to better protect these vulnerable passengers.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), children younger than two years old are at an elevated risk of head and spine injuries in motor vehicle crashes because their heads are relatively large and their necks smaller with weak musculature. By supporting the entire torso, neck, head and pelvis, a rear facing car seat distributes crash forces over the entire body rather than focusing them only at belt contact points. When a child is placed in a rear facing car seat through age two or older, they are provided with optimal support for their head and neck in the event of a crash.

Research supports this legislation. A review of child passenger best practices by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) found that the direction in which seats are facing plays a significant role in car seat effectiveness.¹ A University of Virginia study, *Car safety seats for children: rear facing for best protection*, confirmed UMTRI's review. It noted that children (age 0-23 months) in forward facing car seats were significantly more likely to be seriously injured than children restrained in rear facing car seats in all crash types. In fact, children are 75 percent less likely to suffer severe or fatal injuries in a crash if they are facing the rear. The study found the benefit was particularly great in side crashes.²

¹ Weber K. *Crash protection for child passengers. A review of best practice*. University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) 2000311-27.27).

² B Henary, CP Sherwood; *Car safety seats for children: rear facing for best protection*; *Inj Prev*. 2007 Dec; 13(6): 398-402.

Sadly, motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for children in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)). Improperly restrained children traveling in vehicles present a serious public health problem, yet, it can be addressed with a proven solution. Across all age groups, injury risk is lowest (less than two percent) when children are placed in an age-appropriate restraint in the rear seat. Studies show child safety seats reduce the likelihood of infants (under one year old) being killed in a vehicle crash by 71 percent and toddlers (one to four years old) by 54 percent.³ Between 1975 and 2013, child restraints saved an estimated 10,421 lives of children ages four and younger (CDC).

During 2014, 340 children under age five years (car and booster seat ages) were killed and 47,000 more were injured in motor vehicle crashes nationally. For every single death, especially of a young child, the lives of surviving mothers, fathers, siblings, families, friends and communities are irrevocably shattered. These deaths are unnecessary and unacceptable, particularly when solutions are at hand.

We urge New York to enact this lifesaving change to require young children to be safely restrained in rear facing car seats until they have physically matured to be turned forward facing. **We urge you to support A 9594/S 7631.**

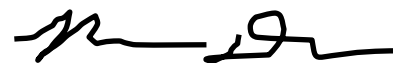
Sincerely,



Jacqueline Gillan
President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety



Kate Carr
President and CEO
Safe Kids Worldwide



Natalie Draisin
US Manager
FIA Foundation

cc: Transportation Committee Members

³ Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security, Child Restraint Safety, available at: <http://bit.ly/1Wb02Ak>.