

Testimony for HB2076
Creating the seat belt safety fund and increasing the fine for adult seat belt violations

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Chairman Proehl and members of the Committee on Transportation, I am pleased to provide written testimony in support of HB2076, which proposes to increase the fine for adult seat belt violations and creates a seat belt safety fund.

Motor vehicle crashes are a serious, though preventable, public health problem, causing more than 360 deaths in Kansas each year. Unintentional injuries kill more Kansans ages 1 – 44 than any other cause, and motor vehicle crashes result in nearly half of these deaths.

Seat belt use saves lives. The U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that seat belts saved an estimated 13,941 lives in 2015 in the U.S. If all vehicle occupants five years and older had worn seat belts, another 2,804 (20 percent) of lives could have been saved during that same year. Increasing the amount of fines for violating seat belt use laws has been shown to be effective in increasing seat belts' use. A 2010 study conducted by NHTSA showed that a 2.4 fold increase in a state's seat belt violation fine was associated with an observed increase in seat belt use of nearly 4 percent. Increasing the fine 4 fold was associated with a nearly 7 fold increase.²

In addition to the increased prevalence of seat belt use by adults that is expected to result from the bill, compliance with the child passenger safety law and teen law is also expected to increase. We know from the statewide seat belt observational surveys conducted by KDOT that children are much more likely to be buckled up if the driver is also belted. If the driver is belted, about 96% of the children are belted. If the driver was not belted, only about 21% of the observed children were also belted.

If HB2076 is enacted, the increased fines collected will provide KDOT with funds to invest in Kansas communities to deliver effective education using nationally recognized education programs. For example, delivery of the Seatbelts Are For Everyone (SAFE) program could be expanded to all high schools in Kansas. The SAFE program is a teen run, peer-to-peer program that focuses on increasing teen restraint compliance through education, positive rewards and enforcement. The Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office reports that since Kansas schools have started offering SAFE, teen seat belt use has increased from 61 percent to 85.5 percent.

Reducing preventable injuries is possible when laws, education and enforcement work hand-in-hand to address the fatalities and injuries occurring on Kansas roadways. KDHE is committed to providing education and supporting efforts that motivate motorists to comply with traffic safety laws.

Thank you for your consideration of this important public health issue. Increasing seat belt use is a key strategy for reducing death, disability and medical costs due to injury sustained in motor vehicle crashes.

¹National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts: 2012 Data, March 2014.

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Strategies to Increase Seat Belt Use: An Analysis of Levels of Fines and the Type of Law, November, 2010.