

**ORAL TESTIMONY**  
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**SAFETY ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE MISSOURI**  
**SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**February 15, 2005**

Good afternoon.

Thanks for the invitation

- Chairman Jon Dolan for the invitation to testify on the Bush Administration's position on primary safety belt laws.

This legislation, if enacted, could save the lives of about 90 Missouri residents each year. I would like to present you with several facts:

National perspective - 2003

- About 43,000 deaths
- 3 million injuries
- \$230 billion in societal costs

In Missouri

- 1,232 deaths
- \$4.7 billion in costs - nearly \$850 per capita
- About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of costs paid by those not involved in the crash

Benefits of Primary Laws

- Primary upgrade is most effective potential improvement for Missouri. Greater than vehicle or roadway upgrades.
- States with primary belt laws have average use rate about 11 percentage points higher than secondary law States.

- This would mean 90 lives saved in Missouri each year, along with 1,060 serious injuries and a savings of \$225 million.
- Your State, county and local police are doing the best they can with a secondary law. They increased use by 6.5 percentage points since 2002, to about 76 percent in 2004.
- But despite their hard work, Missouri's use rate is still below the national average of 80 percent. About a quarter of your State's population -- about 1.4 million people -- are still not buckling up. Your law enforcement officers need the same tools as your neighbors in Iowa and Illinois.
- In comparison to your 76 percent use rate, Iowa and Illinois -- with primary laws -- have use rates of 86 percent and 83 percent, respectively.

### Illinois Experience

- Illinois enacted their primary law in 2003.
- Preliminary figures indicate that in 2004, 113 fewer people were killed in traffic crashes - an 8 percent decrease.
- Lowest number of traffic fatalities in Illinois since 1943.
- Since the primary law was enacted, safety belt use increased by 7 percentage points in Illinois to 83 percent.

### Benefits of Belts

- The evidence leaves no question. Even in low velocity crashes, you are safer wearing your safety belt.
- Considering all types of crashes: belts cut the risk of death in half.

- In rollover crashes, belts reduce the risk of death by 80 percent, meaning 4 out of 5 unbelted rollover deaths would not have happened if the occupants had been belted.

### Opposing Views

- Bush Administration recognizes that there are those who have a philosophical argument against government mandates.
- But we clearly have the need for science-based traffic laws to protect our citizens against death and injury and the devastating economic consequences of long-term disability.
- We cannot condone the sacrifice of the lives of our citizens at the altar of political philosophy. This law is about our core value of human life. In Missouri, it's about 90 human lives every year. Moreover, these tend to be young lives.

### Primary Laws Protect Children

- In 2002, crashes were the leading cause of death across the nation for children age 3 and above, as well as for adults through age 33.
- When the driver buckles up, 92 percent of the time the children in the vehicle are wearing belts or in child safety seats. However, when the driver is not wearing a safety belt, only 72 percent of children are wearing belts or in safety seats.

### Primary Laws Also Protect Youth

- Young people do not respond to isolated educational messages about belt use, but they do change their habits when faced with the threat of a ticket and fine.
- In 2003, 300 of the 994 people who died in cars and light trucks in Missouri were between 14 to 24 years of age. 213 of these young occupants - over 70 percent - were not wearing their safety belts. If these young people had been belted, more than 100 would be with their families today.

### Primary Laws Save Rural and Farmland Lives

- Missouri's rural communities are most at risk. More than 70 percent of your State's traffic deaths occur in rural areas, and the fatality rate per vehicle mile is nearly 3 times higher in rural Missouri than in urban communities.
- In 2003, 82 percent of the 209 pickup truck deaths in the State were unbelted. The proportion unbelted is even higher among 14-24 year old pickup truck fatalities, with 84 percent being unbelted.

### Business and Industry Benefits of Primary Laws

- Unbelted motorists are a burden on your State's employers.
- NHTSA study of 1998-2000 data shows that crashes – both on and off the job - cost employers \$60 billion each year. More than \$6 billion due to nonuse of safety belts.
- Manifested in lost work time, lower productivity due to injury and replacement employees, and increasingly expensive health insurance.

- In Missouri, crashes cost employers more than \$800 million annually, \$310 per employee in the State.

#### Primary Laws Do Not Encourage Differential Enforcement

- Safety is the Bush Administration's #1 transportation priority. However, we are not willing to compromise our values of social and racial equality.
- Administration is committed to ensuring that enactment of primary safety belt laws does not result in racial profiling.
- We have studied the situation carefully and know of no case in which primary safety belt laws have contributed to differential enforcement.
- Primary laws enjoy the support of:
  - National Black Caucus of State Legislators
  - National Org. of Black Law Enforcement Executives
  - National Conference of Black Mayors
  - National Council of Negro Women
  - National Hispanic Medical Association

#### Primary Incentives in Bush Administration Reauthorization Plan

- In addition to saving money, upgrading your safety belt law to primary enforcement could earn a lot of money for Missouri.
- In keeping with the Administration's focus on transportation safety, our priorities for reauthorization include a primary law incentive program that would entitle Missouri to a grant of over \$17 million, if the State upgrades its belt law to primary enforcement or reaches 90% belt use for 2 consecutive years.

## In Closing

- As legislators, you have the power to change the lives of those who may lose a family member or friend because they were not wearing their safety belt. You have the power to turn “if only he’d worn his safety belt” into “thank goodness he was wearing his safety belt.”
- You have the power to make it happen.
- Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be glad to answer any questions.