



**2021 HB 1257**  
**House Transportation Committee**  
**Representative Dan Ruby, Chairman**  
**January 28, 2021**

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee, I am Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I testify in opposition to House Bill 1257. I ask that you give this bill a **Do Not Pass** recommendation.

Hospitals are opposed to this bill because we know that increasing seat belt use is critical to reducing injury and saving lives. This bill would be a step backward because no one who is 18 years of age or older would be required to wear a seat belt.

Our country recently achieved an important milestone in road safety: an all-time record seat belt use rate of 90 percent<sup>1</sup>. Seat belt usage was about 10 percent lower in 2004. North Dakota has only about an 84% seat belt usage<sup>2</sup>. This is fortunately up from only 48% usage 20 years ago, but it is still one of the lowest seat belt usage rates in the country. That is progress, but we need to do more to encourage people to take the lifesaving step of buckling up. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most drivers and passengers killed in vehicle crashes are unrestrained. Here are some other important points:

- Among drivers and front-seat passengers, seat belts reduce the risk of death by 45%, and cut the risk of serious injury by 50%.
- Seat belts prevent drivers and passengers from being ejected during a crash. People not wearing a seat belt are 30 times more likely to be ejected from a vehicle during a crash. More than three out of four people who are ejected during a crash die from their injuries.

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<sup>1</sup>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/seat-belts/seat-belts-save-lives>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

- Seat belts save thousands of lives each year. Seat belts saved almost 13,000 lives in 2009. If all drivers and passengers had worn seat belts that year, almost 4,000 more people would be alive today.
- Of the 37,133 people killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2017, 47% were not wearing seat belts.

This legislative body approved the current seat belt law in 1993. It was then referred to a statewide vote where the people of North Dakota upheld that law. When opponents tried to repeal the law via initiated measure in 1993, the petition drive failed to secure enough signatures. The legislature has not changed the law since. The people of North Dakota know that seat belts reduce injury and save thousands of lives each year and more of them are choosing to buckle up than ever before. We should be passing laws that continue to increase seat belt use, rather than taking a step backward.

For these important reasons, I urge you to give this bill a Do Not Pass recommendation. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President,  
North Dakota Hospital Association