

3/3/2023

Senators,

My name is Dr. Benjamin Axtman and I am a double-board certified Trauma and Critical Care surgeon practicing at Sanford Medical Center in Bismarck. **I am writing today to ask for your support of SB 2362.**

While many claim that this bill is about personal freedom and the right of adults to make their own decisions, I would boldly declare that it is not. The decision to not wear a seatbelt impacts many others. It includes the first responders that respond to the horrific crashes in which occupants have been ejected or injured in a crash. It impacts the families and loved ones that are impacted by a death or injury that could have been prevented. It impacts the healthcare systems with are often left with unpaid medical bills from those impacted in a crash who are uninsured or underinsured. It impacts the state taxpayers when they are left holding the costs of those that end up on disability or other support systems.

As a medical provider, I know many of the injuries I treat could have been prevented with the use of a seatbelt. Motor vehicles are now crafted with many safety features that are designed to protect the occupants so long as they stay in their seating position within the car. Based on the data that I have seen from the state, 62% of the fatalities on our North Dakota roadways were to unbuckled occupants. With our seatbelt usage at one of the lowest in the country, it is time to change that statistic.

It is time to set good policy within our state. Thirty-four other states have passed this legislation and they saw a 10-12% increase in seatbelt usage – even without law enforcement. Given that the North Dakota House just passed a bill that would increase the speed limits on interstates to 80 mph, if passed, it would be critical that we also have a primary seatbelt law to increase our seatbelt usage. Speed and unbelted passengers make up a large percentage of the deaths on our roadways. This statistic could be improved by employing policies that protect our citizens

Let's pass this bill, protect the people of our state, prevent needless injuries and deaths and send a message that tells people of our state that seatbelts are important!

I hope you will support SB 2362 with a DO PASS vote!!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Benjamin Axtman', written over a horizontal line.

Benjamin Axtman, MD FACS