



House Transportation Committee

IN SUPPORT- SB 2362

March 9, 2023

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Grand Forks, ND

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee, my name is Pete Kuhn and I am the North Dakota Driver's Safety State Coordinator. I appreciate your time today.

Before I get into our support for this bill, I'd like to spend just a moment reminding you who we are and why we are here. AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization with nearly 38 million members. 83,000 of those members live in North Dakota – a staggering number when you consider the overall population of our state.

As some of you know, AARP also has volunteers who teach AARP Smart Driver Courses across the country and a number here in North Dakota aimed at helping older drivers stay safe on the road. According to the National Safety Council, seat belts save lives. They are the single most effective traffic safety device to prevent death and injury in a motor vehicle crash. That's why one of the important parts of that course is the section on safety. The first point on safety is devoted to safety belts and the importance of wearing them every time, no matter the distance. SB 2362 works toward decreasing motor vehicle crash deaths in North Dakota and research shows other states that have implemented such a law have seen crash deaths decrease.

A lot of issues touch older Americans and their ability to live safe, independent and healthy lives. Most of our work fits into three areas; helping people choose where they live, remain financially secure and access affordable health care.

I spent 35 years as an insurance adjuster, 33 of them investigating vehicle accidents. I have actually helped walk a field at 3 AM to help locate bodies from an intersection accident where one vehicle rolled and the occupants who were not wearing seat belts and were ejected. The following is a couple of the more extreme situations.

Around 1990 there was a 2 vehicle, residential intersection accident in Grand Forks. A south bound work van and a west bound car. Both were traveling around 15 to 20 miles per hour and hit right front to left front. The van driver was not wearing a seat belt. The driver side door opened in the impact and the driver started falling out. At that point, the two vehicles slid together and the van driver was crushed and died at the scene. The car driver, wearing a seat belt, wasn't even hurt.

In 2001, there was a collision on highway # 2 at the intersection with highway 18, by Larimore. The driver of a large farm truck, going North on Highway 18, failed to see a west bound Chevy Suburban with 3 men in it, approaching from the East at approximately 65 miles per hour. The truck driver slowed as though he was going to stop but then accelerated to cross the West bound lanes. The driver of the Chevy applied the brakes but could not avoid the accident. Both the driver and the front seat passenger in the Chevy were wearing seat belts and the passenger in the rear seat was not. The Chevy was badly damaged and when you looked at it, it was hard to believe that anybody in the front seat could have survived. However, with air bags and seat belts in use, both men in the front seat had minor injuries, were treated and released within a couple of hours. The passenger, not wearing a seat belt was pronounced dead at the scene.

In extreme situations such as two vehicles going 70 miles an hour hit head on, probably only God can save them. However, the great majority of accidents are survivable with the use of seat belts. This is especially true of one vehicle, rollover accidents where people not wearing a seat belt are ejected.

Please help save lives by making people use their seat belts by supporting SB 2362. Thank you!