

68th Legislative Assembly Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill No. 2362
Senate Transportation Committee
February 3, 2023

Chairman Clemens and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, my name is Kaitlin Atkinson, and I am the Vision Zero Regional Coordinator for the Grand Forks County Sheriff's Office. I cover 14 counties in the northeastern part of the state, providing education, resources, and messaging to prevent car crashes. When I walk into my office each morning, I scan my email looking to see if there are any updates to the states crash statistics. Each time I get one of those emails, I hold my breath. I wonder if it was someone in my region, if it was someone I could have reached, or even worse, if it is someone I did get the opportunity of talking to.

Just this week, I visited a rural school in my region talking to their students about seatbelts and safe driving habits. It is terrifying when I have elementary students standing in front of me saying to me "My parents don't make me buckle up unless we are going on the highway!". At the young age of 8, this child should have still been in a booster seat because of their size or at least the minimum of being buckled up as required by state law, however their parents are displaying that seatbelts aren't important. On the other end I have students that share how they tell their parents to buckle up because they know how important there are. Unfortunately, I don't hear this side as often.

While I do all that I can to educate kids on the importance of seat belts and even share that North Dakota law says they must buckle up, it never fails that a kid is asking why their parents don't have to. How do you answer that question without telling the kid that their life is valued more than their parents, or that their parents get to make that choice even if it means they could lose their life in a crash because of it? How do you not send a message to that child that once they turn 18 they can decide for themselves if a seatbelt is important enough to wear regardless of the consequences? The simple answer is, I have yet to find a way in the hundreds of conversations I have had in the last 2 and a half years.

By passing Senate Bill 2362, you would be telling all North Dakotans that their life does matter to you. It would be exhibiting that the simple act of buckling up is crucial to making sure parents make it home to their kids at the end of the day.

Please vote DO PASS on SB 2362.

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