

Good morning Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Mary Waldo and I am the North Dakota State Trauma Systems Coordinator for the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). Joining me is Dawn Mayer, the Child Passenger Safety Program Director for the NDDoH. We are here to testify in support of Senate Bill 2121.

Prior to my current role as the State Trauma Systems Coordinator, I served the public for eight years as a Registered Nurse (RN) in one of North Dakota's busiest emergency and trauma centers. Prior to that, I spent several years volunteering on a rural North Dakota ambulance service as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). I don't remember all of the patients I've lost over the years, but I do remember those whose lives ended because they did not wear a seat belt.

For those of us who work in emergency medicine, whether pre-hospital or in an emergency department, the overwhelming sense of loss that comes with a preventable death lingers, sometimes for years. This emotional toll weighs heavy on the minds of emergency workers throughout the state, many of them volunteers in their rural communities, and it is often the reason that a great nurse or paramedic ultimately burns out and chooses a different career.

In North Dakota, every 11 days an unbelted vehicle passenger dies. Further, in 2020, nearly 70% of all motor vehicle fatalities were from unbelted occupants. Many of these are preventable deaths.

In addition to the financial and societal costs associated with unbelted crash victims, there is a significant and long-lasting emotional toll placed on our valuable emergency workers.

Primary seat belt laws work and the majority of North Dakotans support a primary seat belt law. In 2020, results of a statewide survey showed that 61% of North Dakotans favored a primary seat belt law.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. Dawn Mayer will now provide testimony.

Good morning Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Dawn Mayer and I am the Child Passenger Safety Program Director for the NDDoH.

As part of my job, I coordinate child passenger safety trainings statewide for professionals and teach occupant protection. As Mary mentioned, the majority of people favor a primary seat belt law indicating they understand the benefits of wearing a seat belt; however, there are others that do not understand.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), a person is more likely to survive a crash if they are wearing a seat belt. When a crash occurs and you are saved by your seat belt, you will be able to help yourself get out of the car, as well as assist anyone else in the vehicle who is affected by the crash. If you are not buckled up, you are more likely to receive injuries or die (NHTSA). If you are injured, chances are you may not be able to help yourself out of the car or help others affected by the crash.

When someone chooses not to buckle up and is injured or killed in a crash, it affects many lives and systems; your family, your work, emergency responders, law enforcement, fire departments, hospitals, insurance costs and many more.

A primary seat belt law is an evidence-based strategy to increase seat belt use (NHTSA). Research shows that states that transitioned to a primary seat belt law have experienced up to a 10-12% increase in their observed seat belt use (NHTSA). Wearing a seat belt is the most effective way to prevent death and serious injury in a crash. Primary seat belt laws save lives.

This concludes our testimony. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.