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Rep. Dan Ruby
State Capitol
600 E. Boulevard Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58505

Chairman Ruby and Members of the House Transportation Committee,

On behalf of AAA – The Auto Club Group and our more than 69,000 members in North Dakota I'm writing to express support for SB 2121, which would allow primary enforcement of the state's seat belt law.

There is no debating the effectiveness of seat belts. Even those who don't routinely wear them admit they would buckle up if they knew they would be involved in a crash. Unfortunately, no one knows when a tragedy will occur. Requiring use by everyone, every trip is a proven way to reduce injuries, deaths and the immeasurable impact traffic crashes have on North Dakota families. The annual statistics are telling. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration estimates that 44 lives were saved by seat belts in North Dakota in 2017 and another 18 could have been saved if all vehicle occupants had worn their belt.

When someone is injured or dies in a traffic crash, we all pay. These costs, which include emergency services, hospital services and survivor payments, are paid for by all taxpayers and insurance policyholders.

As you know, North Dakota currently has a primary seat belt law for teens under the age of 18. That group, however, too often follows the poor examples set by some adults and go unbuckled when traveling alone or with friends. That issue can be solved with sound evidence-based policy, which includes allowing for primary enforcement of the law for all ages. It may also help parents enforce household rules. According to an NDSU study, more than 99 percent of parents expect their teens to wear a seat belt at all times. Yet, several studies and a review of the data paint a different picture. As a result, young lives are being cut short or significantly altered due to serious injuries.

Through education, enforcement and sound policy, we can increase seat belt use in North Dakota and reduce the unnecessary loss of life and the personal and economic toll traffic crashes have on everyone. Stemming the tide of crash fatalities and serious injuries starts with embracing a culture of safety and setting an example for our children to follow. For all of us that begins before even putting the vehicle in gear -- by buckling up. It is a life-saving habit best established at a young age and continued through adulthood.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to express support for this important measure and urge a "Do Pass" recommendation by the committee.

Sincerely,

Gene LaDoucer
Public Affairs Director

AAA-The Auto Club Group (ACG) is a membership based, non-profit corporation operating in fourteen states and two US Territories. It is one of the largest American Automobile Association (AAA) clubs in the United States with approximately 14 million members. ACG provides travel, insurance, automotive, and financial services to its members. In North Dakota, AAA – The Auto Club Group serves more than 69,000 members and works to represent the interests of members and the traveling public in the state legislature.