

Good morning Chairman Clemens and members of the Senate 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 seatbelt.

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

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

Good morning Chairman Clemens and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. As previously stated, 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 training statewide for professionals; as part of that training, we teach the benefits of occupant restraint systems.

According to the National Safety Council, seat belts are the single most effective traffic safety device to prevent death and injury in a motor vehicle crash. Seat belts protect you by:

- Keeping you in the vehicle. This is important, as you are 25 times more likely to be killed if you're thrown from a vehicle during a crash.
- Keeping you in control of your vehicle if you are forced to swerve or brake suddenly.
- Spreading the force of impact over a large surface area and the strongest parts of the body - your bones.
- Allowing your body to slow down gradually, lessening the impact on internal organs.
- Preventing impact with the interior of the vehicle, such as the steering wheel, dash or windshield, which increases your chance of remaining conscious after a crash.
- Preventing trauma to the brain and spinal cord caused by sudden change in motion.
- Preventing collision with other occupants of the vehicle. If you don't wear a seat belt and are involved in a crash, other occupants in the vehicle are at risk of injury from you hitting them.

One death on North Dakota roads is too many. A primary seat belt law is an evidence-based strategy to help move North Dakota toward zero motor vehicle crash deaths. These deaths are preventable. To prevent death from motor vehicle crashes, everybody needs to wear a seat belt - every trip, every time.

The North Dakota Department of Health is pleased to be partnering with the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the North Dakota Highway Patrol on the Vision Zero initiative and is committed to reducing motor vehicle crash deaths and serious injuries to North Dakotans.

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