

TESTIMONY OF
JUDITH LEE STONE,
PRESIDENT
ADVOCATES FOR
HIGHWAY AND AUTO
SAFETY

ON THE PRESENT
STATE OF
CHILD BOOSTER SEAT
SAFETY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CONSUMER AFFAIRS,
FOREIGN COMMERCE
AND TOURISM

OF THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE
AND TRANSPORTATION

APRIL 24, 2001

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY

Child restraints are required and regulated for children up to four years of age, and lap/shoulder belts are designed to protect adults. In between is the “forgotten child,” roughly ages 5 to 9 years old, who has not been the focus of safety laws and regulations. There are over 19.5 million children in the 5 to 9 year old age group, and about 500 of these children die each year as occupants in motor vehicle crashes. The motor vehicle fatality rate for this age group has remained constant over the past two decades, despite the fact that the fatality rate has decreased for other age groups -- children 0 to 4, and children 10 to 15 years old, in the same time period.

In addition, safety recommendations from government agencies and private organizations alike advise parents to place their children in the rear to maximize their safety. The safety of these children can be improved by requiring the use of booster seats, so that adult lap/shoulder belts will better fit these children, by regulating the performance of booster seats to ensure safety, and by making changes to improve the rear seat environment to afford children a safer ride.

Advocates’ testimony contains the following recommendations:

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Section 14 of the TREAD Act includes many provisions that can enhance the safety of child occupants, including improvements in child restraint testing, more stringent injury criteria and performance requirements for booster seats, to name just three. These and other child safety ideas were originally contained in the Child Passenger Protection Act of 2000, which was introduced by Sen. Fitzgerald as S. 2070 in the last Congress, a bill that was wholeheartedly supported by Advocates.

Advocates is acutely aware of the need for improved child safety and we have documented that this concern is shared by the American public. In a 1999 poll, commissioned by

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crash and keep the child inside the
restraint. Booster seats are only
intended to provide a platform that lifts
the child up off the vehicle seat in order
to improve the fit of the child in the
adult seat belt. An improper fit of an
adult seat belt causes the lap belt to
ride up over the stomach and the
shoulder belt to cut across the neck.

In a crash a seat belt that does not fit
properly can cause critical or even fatal
injuries. In addition, if the shoulder
strap portion of the lap/shoulder belt is
uncomfortable, children will place it
behind their backs, defeating any safety
benefits the belt system might provide.

Studies show that most adult belt
systems do not fit children under 4'9"
and less than 80 pounds.

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adoption of booster seat laws in every state.

B. FEDERAL

REGULATION OF CHILD

SAFETY

Although in the last 20 years there has been unequivocal progress in motor vehicle child safety, with improved child safety seat protection and adoption of state laws requiring their use, there has not been a great deal of progress with booster seats.

The more we know, the more we are compelled to act in order to ensure maximum protection for every child of every age, on every ride in a motor vehicle. NHTSA has been in the lead on improving child safety in a number of ways. For example, in a 1995 final

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enormous resources have been expended to develop and market entertainment equipment for children in motor vehicles, particularly in the rear seat, by contrast little has been done to provide comfortable seating for children that would enhance safety.

Moreover, agency regulations have also focused primarily on safety performance for adults, and on requirements for add-on child restraints for children 0 - 4 years old. As a result, the rear seat environment is not particularly friendly for children ages 4 to 8 years old.

Adult seat belts do not fit or properly restrain younger children.

The required three-point lap/shoulder

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safety standard for seat back strength
has not been substantially revised to
improve seat back performance since
the standard was first adopted in 1971.
In fact, NHTSA research and tests for
the proposed amendments to the fuel
integrity standard showed that almost
all front seats failed in 50 miles-per-
hour rear impact collisions.

This confluence of design
issues makes it all the more important
that manufacturers and NHTSA focus
on the plight of the forgotten child.
Since parents are being instructed to
place children in this age group in the
rear seat for their own safety, it is
imperative that the rear seat be a safe
environment in which comfort
reinforces safe behaviors.

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set a minimum height for the booster

seat platform above the vehicle seat.

Use recommendations could be based

on this requirement. Also, booster

seats without backs may result in neck

or head injuries, especially for taller,

older children whose heads and necks

clear the top of the rear vehicle seat

back. Currently, even booster seats

with backs are not required to provide

crash protection for the child's head

and neck. Booster seats with

improved backs may be necessary to

protect taller children from head and

neck injuries. Likewise, belt-adjusting

arms should be examined to determine

whether they are necessary to enhance

booster seat safety. The agency

should also test booster seat features

**DISCLOSURE OF
FEDERAL GRANTS AND
CONTRACTS**

I, Judith Lee Stone,
President of Advocates for
Highway and Auto Safety,
hereby certify that Advocates
for Highway and Auto Safety
has not received any federal
funds in fiscal years 2000 and
2001.