
January 13, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

Re: Letter of Support – Senate Bill 176 – Rear-Facing Child Safety Seats - Requirement

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration (MDOT MVA) supports Senate Bill 176 as a means to better protect the roadways' most vulnerable users by requiring rear-facing safety seats to protect infants and toddlers in the event of a crash.

Senate Bill 176 requires children being transported in a motor vehicle under the age of two years to be secured in a rear-facing child safety seat that complies with the manufacturer's weight and height limitations. The American Academy of Pediatrics and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends that children should ride rear-facing for as long as possible, as it offers the best protection in the event of a crash.

When children ride forward-facing, their heads, which for toddlers are disproportionately large and heavy, are thrown forward, possibly resulting in spine and head injuries. In contrast, rear-facing seats cradle the child's neck, head, and spine during a crash, reducing the risk of injury. There are no known harmful effects of riding rear-facing longer while the benefits of doing so have been observed for years. The back of the seat also absorbs most of the impact energy, reducing the amount of force exerted on the infant or toddler.

Over the past five years, Maryland has averaged 12 fatalities and over 3,000 injuries in motor vehicle crashes involving passengers under the age of 13. During that time, there were 9 fatalities involving children under the age of 2 and an additional 581 were injured. Nationally, a total of 844 children younger than 13 died in motor vehicle crashes in 2019; nearly three-quarters of these deaths were children riding in passenger vehicles.

To reinforce NHTSA recommendations, 15 states, including neighboring Virginia and Pennsylvania, require children ride rear-facing until at least the age of 2. Adding the rear-facing seat requirement would bring Maryland in line with the most up-to-date safety standards.

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In enacting this requirement, the MDOT MVA is helping to protect some of Maryland's most vulnerable individuals and supporting our statewide goal of reaching zero fatalities on Maryland roadways. For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration respectfully requests the Committee grant Senate Bill 176 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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