



November 26, 2019

James Owens
Acting Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
Room W12-140
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Docket No. NHTSA-2019-0093-0001 Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards:
Occupant Crash Protection

Dear Acting Administrator Owens:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA's) Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) on occupant crash protection. The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) is a national nonprofit association representing the State and territorial Highway Safety Offices (SHSOs). The SHSOs implement Statewide programs to address behavioral highway safety issues and partner with the NHTSA to distribute grants for these purposes.

The lack of occupant restraint remains a leading factor in crash-related deaths and injuries. All States maintain a focus on occupant protection and countermeasures to encourage all passengers to buckle up in every vehicle, in every seating position and during every trip.

On November 18, GHSA released a new report "Rear Seat Belt Use: Little Change in Four Years, Much More to Do."¹ GHSA's report expands on the background that NHTSA provides in its ANPRM on the well-known effectiveness of seat belt use in preventing death and injury in a crash and how rear seat belt use lags front seat belt use. This is reflected in federal surveys, national crash data and other public surveys.

GHSA's report describes several additional factors that support the need for urgent action on rear seat safety:

- Many consumers do not prioritize rear belt use but rather consider it unnecessary (for short trips in particular), forget to buckle up or perceive no deterrent threat from traffic enforcement.
- Enforcement of seat belt laws is more challenging for the back seat due to more difficult visibility.

¹ <https://www.ghsa.org/index.php/resources/RearBeltReport19>

- A growing body of evidence suggests that new crash protection countermeasures more common to the front seat have extended the safety of these seating positions beyond that of the back seat.

Finally, since 2015 we have achieved little change in key rear-belt-related metrics. Unbelted fatalities decreased slightly along with other kinds of fatalities. However, rear belt use seems to have decreased slightly, and there have been few changes in State laws to require rear belt use. As such, GHSA recommends a range of action steps in legislation, enforcement, public education and community engagement. Particularly, GHSA urges states to adopt primary seat belt laws for all seating positions with impactful penalties.

Today, GHSA urges NHTSA to complete its rulemaking to require a safety belt use warning system for seating positions in the rear seat, at the very least for passenger cars, SUVs and trucks with rear passenger use.

The ANPRM presents strong evidence of the effectiveness and likely consumer acceptance of rear seat belt warnings. Several automakers are already voluntarily implementing rear belt warnings, demonstrating their technological feasibility and practicality.

GHSA acknowledges the need for detailed feedback on rear belt warning system characteristics unique to the rear seat, such as specifications, preventing inadvertent or intentional defeat, interaction with other warnings, and harmonization with child restraint systems. We urge NHTSA to gather and incorporate technical feedback from all commenters with the ultimate aim of promulgating a rear-belt warning requirement.

GHSA appreciates the opportunity to submit comments, and we look forward to continuing to partner with NHTSA on the shared mission of saving lives on our nation's roads.

Regards,



Darrin Grondel
Chair, Governors Highway Safety Association
Director, Washington Traffic Safety Commission