



May 23, 2022

Safe Kids Worldwide
Comment to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Federal Register Notice No. 87 FR 23780
Uniform Procedures for State Highway Safety Grant Programs

Docket No. NHTSA-2022-0036

Introduction

Safe Kids Worldwide thanks the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for this opportunity to provide comment as the agency considers updates to its critically important State Highway Safety Grant Programs. This comment focuses on several subject areas identified by NHTSA in its request for comment associated with this docket: National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS), Reducing Disparities and Increasing Community Participation, and Performance Measures.

Safe Kids strongly believes that changes to NHTSA's State Highway Safety Grant programs should not only advance the holistic Safe System Approach but address the persistent and increasingly well-documented disparities that underserved communities and especially their children face in terms of safety on the road. To do so successfully, NHTSA should incentivize the states to expand public participation in the development of Highway Safety Plans (HSPs) and consider new performance measures that hold states accountable for meeting the needs of all their road users, including non-motorists, and for advancing NRSS goals in their jurisdiction.

Comments from Safe Kids Worldwide will focus on child passenger safety as it relates to NHTSA's RFC.

National Roadway Safety Strategy

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law contained a provision urging states to encourage more widespread and proper use of child restraints, with an emphasis on underserved populations. Safe Kids agrees with this approach, noting the broad range of underserved communities across the country, including low-income, remote/rural areas, communities with limited access to health care, Native American reservations, and others.

Although we have made great strides in the field of child passenger safety, kids hailing from traditionally underserved groups and communities continue to face disparities in their safety on the road. For example, from 2009-2018 African American children faced a motor vehicle occupant death rate per 100,000 more than double that of Hispanic or white children.^{1 2} Further, almost twice as many African American and Hispanic children who died in 2009-2010 crashes were not buckled in car seats or safety belts compared to white children.³

Children growing up in rural America face similar road safety disparities. Rural children ages 14 and under are between two and five times as likely to be seriously or fatally injured in a crash than their urban counterparts.⁴ In addition, a 2017 study comparing urban and rural areas of three states found that rural locations were associated with higher levels of child restraint system misuse.⁵

In order to strengthen CPS programs for everyone, Safe Kids supports:

- Establishing a separate performance measure for child passenger safety as part of state highway safety plans, encouraging states to include aggressive CPS programs and show their progress.
- Reserving 10 percent of Section 405 Occupant Protection Incentive Grant funds for child passenger safety services and education directed towards underserved communities.
- Encourage NHTSA to collaborate with Safe Kids and other stakeholders to improve and expand the reach of virtual child passenger safety checks.
- Study the child passenger safety challenges faced by kids with special needs and their parents, including consideration of those with physical and intellectual disabilities as well as children on the autism spectrum.

Reducing Disparities and Increasing Community Participation

To reduce the disparities described above, Safe Kids recommends that NHTSA make child passenger safety a priority as part of the 402 and 405 highway safety grant programs. In particular, grants to states for child passenger safety should emphasize high-risk and underserved populations per instructions in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

One of the program elements of the new 405 BIL language is for states to recruit and train occupant protection safety professionals, nationally certified child passenger safety technicians, police officers, fire and emergency medical personnel, and educators serving low-income and underserved populations. Having community members serve as CPS technicians is a great way to increase participation by meeting communities where they are, and to make sure that these vital services, car seat checks and inspections, are conducted.

As part of state fatality and injury numbers, it is also critical that age and racial groups are included to give better data on crash causation and the nature and degree of disparities over time.

Performance Measures

NHTSA should look at tangible events and metrics to measure performance. The Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) should help determine overall metrics to show how individual states are doing. In addition, the number of Child Passenger Safety inspections performed by states each year is a good metric in determining CPS outcomes.

Closing

Safe Kids Worldwide appreciates the opportunity to comment on updates to the highway safety grant programs. Safe Kids is proud to support the Safe System Approach and has made transportation equity, with an emphasis on high risk and underserved populations, a priority for our organization.

The BIL contains important provisions directing states to include CPS as a part of the 402 and 405 state safety grant programs. In particular, the language focusing on high risk and underserved populations is critical to ensuring that ALL children are safe in and around motor vehicles.

We look forward to working with the Department of Transportation on this important issue.

¹ Data on children killed as occupants in motor vehicle crashes as well as data on restraint use were obtained from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Fatality and Injury Reporting System Tool (FIRST). Years selected were 2009–2013 combined and 2014–2018 combined. Age ranges selected were 0–8, 0–13 and 13–

19.

² According to an AAP report in 2018, there have been declining rates for child occupant deaths for all race and ethnic groups, but “improvements in mortality rates among African American children have slowed more recently.” Durbin, D.R.; Hoffman, B.D.; Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention. (November 2018). Child Passenger Safety. *Pediatrics*. Volume 142(5). Available at: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/5/e20182461>

³ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention. (2020, February 4). Child Passenger Safety. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/childpassengersafety/index.html>

⁴ Huseh, Andrea. (2013). *Misinformation Contributing to Safety Issues in Vehicle Restraints for Children: A Rural/Urban Comparison*, MPC-13-264. North Dakota State University - Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, Fargo: Mountain-Plains Consortium. Retrieved from: <http://www.mountain-plains.org/pubs/pdf/MPC13-264.pdf>

⁵ Hafner JW, Kok SJ, Wang H, Wren DL, Aitken ME, Miller BK, Anderson BL, Monroe KW. (October 2017). Child Passenger Restraint System Misuse in Rural Versus Urban Children: A Multisite Case-Control Study. *Pediatr Emerg Care*. Volume 33(10). Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27753712/>