



Pennsylvanians United for Safety

**Testimony of Dr. H. Arnold Muller  
Former Pennsylvania State Secretary of Health  
House Judiciary Committee  
Public Hearing on House Bill 2078.  
July 14, 1998**

My name is Dr. H. Arnold Muller and I am here to speak in support of upgrading the Pennsylvania Seat Belt Law to Standard Enforcement as introduced in House Bill 2078. My testimony today not only reflects my long time personal interest in this issue, but I've also been asked to speak on behalf of the 2.9 million citizens represented in the Pennsylvanians United for Safety Coalition. The Coalition is supported by the National Safety Council, specifically the Air Bag and Seat Belt Safety Campaign in Washington, D.C. Pennsylvanians United for Safety has 43 member organizations at this time. A listing of the Membership is included on the last page of my prepared remarks.

We need to upgrade our seat belt law to standard enforcement because hundreds of people are needlessly dying on our highways. PERIOD! Most Pennsylvanians support this legislation since current usage is about 65%. In other words, 65% of Pennsylvanians vote each and every

day to protect themselves and their loved ones by buckling-up. This information is based on PennDOT observations and follows 11 years of public service radio announcements, in school educational messages and highway signage following passage of our current seat belt law in November of 1987.

Seat belt usage peaked at about 71% in 1994 and 1995. Since then, PennDOT reports indicate usage has dropped and fatalities and serious injuries are on the increase. Why? One reason could be a normal statistical bell curve effect after 11 years of secondary enforcement. In addition, some citizens feel our modern vehicles, with air bags and over 40 safety features installed, provide ample protection for motorists and therefor seat belts are not necessary. Unfortunately, the cost of such an attitude can be deadly.

The question is why should we care? We care because we simply can't afford not to care. It seems to me, and many of my fellow Pennsylvanians, that public safety is a core function of Government. In the 1950's the General Assembly found itself in much the same debate with regard to serious illnesses, i.e. polio, whooping cough and measles. As a result of a national public health concern, the Federal Government developed several immunization programs and provided support for the States to implement these programs. In communities across Pennsylvania,

all citizens were required to report to their community school building or local hospital to receive their shots and/or pills. The goal was to eliminate these deadly diseases. It took a concerned Pennsylvania General Assembly to identify the health risk, develop a plan to guarantee the solution and ENFORCE COMPLIANCE. The results were tremendous. In 1955, Pennsylvania had 796 cases of Polio. As a matter of fact, during the 1950's the Commonwealth recorded 200 to 800 polio cases per year. Today, polio is no longer a threat to our children. During the same decade, the State reported 15,000 to 45,000 cases of measles per year. Today we average about one case per year. It goes on and on.

There were opponents, back in those critical years, claiming government intrusion. It took a compassionate and understanding General Assembly working with the Federal Government to embrace the immunization programs and eradicate these deadly illnesses. Lives were saved, children could fulfill their dreams and families were protected.

Unfortunately, we will probably never eliminate motor vehicle crashes, but experience tells us that Pennsylvania values the lives of its citizens and dealing with the public cost of motor vehicle crashes is a challenge we must address. The General Assembly has the responsibility to focus on the core functions of Government and public safety is certainly a core function of government. The fact that over 100 children under the

age of 16 die on our highways is enough to elevate this issue to one of immediate concern. If you include teenagers and 20 year olds, the number of fatalities jumps to nearly 300. This loss of life is unacceptable in our Commonwealth.

To continue the discussion of core functions of government, we can examine the magnitude of crash statistics as compared to crime statistics. In 1996, The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania endured 671 murders verses 1,470 highway fatalities; violent crimes totaled 26,261 verses 89,711 crashes involving personal injury and 22,617 cases of aggravated assault verses 51,802 crashes involving property damage only. Crime is a major concern in our society and the Governor and General Assembly have acted accordingly with tougher enforcement and new laws designed to protect our citizens. However, highway crash statistics far exceed the crime numbers and are even more devastating to our families.

These statistics indicate motor vehicle crashes impact thousands of families each year and cost the taxpayer of Pennsylvania billions of dollars. These are not my numbers, these are statistics reported by the Pennsylvania State Police and PennDOT.

Currently 14 States and the District of Columbia have Standard Enforcement laws in place. As a matter of fact, the toughest seat belt law

in the United States is in Washington D.C.

The State of New York was the first State to upgrade its seat belt law in 1984. Last year, the state of Maryland upgraded its seat belt law to Standard Enforcement. This year, Standard Enforcement legislation passed the New Jersey House of Representatives and will await Senate action later this session. Ohio is reviewing similar legislation. The Governor of Delaware has endorsed standard enforcement and the Delaware House of Representatives passed the legislation. However the session ended without Senate action and the legislation will be reintroduced in January. States that upgrade their seat belt laws to Standard Enforcement generally experience a 20% drop in fatalities and equally significant decreases in serious injuries.

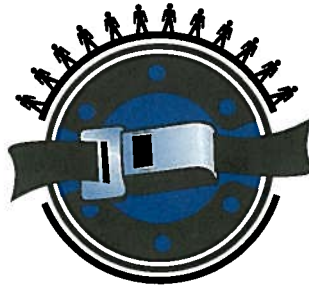
My final comments concern the children of Pennsylvania who endure many lifelong preventable injuries. There is a direct correlation between drivers being buckled-up and children being properly restrained. Studies indicate if the driver is buckled-up there is about a 90% chance the child will be restrained. However, if the driver is not buckled-up, then there is only about a 30% chance that the child will be restrained. Regarding cost savings, please keep in mind an unrestrained child who hits the windshield and survives can accumulate lifetime medical bills of \$5 and \$8 million dollars. The majority of this cost is paid by taxpayers. This explains why

the new Federal highway funding legislation known as the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century or TEA - 21 has a \$500 million incentive account for states to draw upon if they upgrade their seat belt laws and therefor demonstrate Federal dollar savings.

I ask you to review the facts surrounding this issue and move the Bill out of Committee. I ask you to discuss this important issue with the Leadership of the House of Representatives and stress Standard Enforcement of seat belt use must be included in any Highway Safety Legislation considered this Fall.

Thank you, Chairman Gannon, and all the Members of the House Judiciary Committee for scheduling this important Public Hearing and offering the Pennsylvanians United for Safety Coalition an opportunity to provide Testimony today. Please report HB 2078 out of Committee and offer the entire House of Representatives the opportunity to debate this issue. Thank You!

Mr. Chairman, I will do my best to answer any questions at this time.



Pennsylvanians United for Safety  
**Membership, July 14, 1998**

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety  
Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign  
American Automobile Manufacturers Association  
American Trauma Society, Pennsylvania Division  
ARCCA Incorporated  
Bucks County Emergency Health Council, Inc.  
Center for Violence and Injury Control,  
Allegheny University of the Health Sciences  
Coalition for Lifetime Injury Prevention and Trauma Team,  
PennState Geisinger Health System  
Committee on Trauma of the American College of Surgeons  
Ellwood City Police Department  
Firemen's Legislative Federation of Pennsylvania  
Hollern & Son's Dodge  
Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania  
MADD  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Region III  
National Transportation Safety Board  
PA AAA Federation  
PA Association for Safety Education  
PA Association of Child Care Agencies  
PA Association of Private School Administrators  
PA Association of Pupil Services Administrators  
PA Chamber of Business and Industry  
PA Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics  
PA Chapter American College of Emergency Physicians  
PA Chiefs of Police Association  
PA Coalition for Vehicle Choice  
PA DUI Association  
PA Emergency Health Services Council  
PA Emergency Nurses Association  
PA Fire Services Institute  
PA Fireman Publication  
PA Mature Drivers Taskforce  
PA Medical Society  
PA Osteopathic Medical Association  
PA Partnerships for Children  
PA PTA  
PA Public Health Association  
PA SADD  
PA School Counselors Association  
PA State Coroners Association  
PA State Nurses Association  
PA Trauma Nurse Advisory Council  
PA Trauma Systems Foundation  
The Trauma Center - Brandywine Hospital  
**44 organizations representing 3.1 million Pennsylvanians**