

## Testimony of Safe Kids Pennsylvania

In support of HB 2031, The Carbon Monoxide Standards Alarm Act

Before the House Consumer Affairs Committee

January 31, 2012

Good Morning. My name is Allyson Fulton, Child Safety Coordinator, of Safe Kids Pennsylvania. I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2031. Requiring a carbon monoxide alarm, will help protect the youngest residents of the Commonwealth.

Safe Kids Pennsylvania is a statewide grassroots organization focused on preventing the #1 killer of children - unintentional injuries. While people often think of unintentional injuries as "accidents", these injuries and deaths can frequently be prevented either by active supervision or by an inexpensive safety device.

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, and tasteless gas, often referred to as "The Silent Killer." Understanding that we cannot smell, see, or taste CO, we must take a proactive approach to protecting our children from this danger. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 83% of Pennsylvania housing uses some form of fossil-fuel burning heat, which can generate CO. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. Many of these symptoms are similar to the flu and other common ailments, making CO poisoning difficult to diagnose unless it is suspected. CO causes illness by decreasing the amount of oxygen present in a person's body. Because of their high metabolic rates and high tissue oxygen demands, children are biologically at increased risk of CO poisoning; they are among the most susceptible, experiencing the effects of CO before other members of their family. According to Safe Kids USA, of all age groups, children ages 4 and under have the highest rates of emergency department visits for CO-related incidents.

Health and safety experts agree that the use of a carbon monoxide alarm is a critical safety intervention. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) promote carbon monoxide alarms as a way to protect kids and families from poisoning-related injuries and deaths. A CO alarm in the home can give families an early warning when concentrations of carbon monoxide reach dangerous levels. It is estimated that CO alarms may prevent half of such related deaths from occurring.

Knowing that relatively few families have CO alarms in their homes and that more public education is needed to spread awareness about the dangers of carbon monoxide, I urge you to support HB 2031. Safe Kids Pennsylvania will continue to strive to educate families and caregivers thru its statewide affiliate network about the dangers of carbon monoxide exposure and effective ways to prevent fatalities and injuries.

Hello, and thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Meg Watt, and I come bearing the message of voices around the state imploring you for legislation. That is the unique challenge: How do you condense the heartache of loved ones lost into a compelling and thought-provoking message encouraging lawmakers to save lives? Let me share the words of one such voice. Dena Yeagley recently shared her feelings on a similar piece of legislation. She shares the heartbreaking loss of her daughter, Abby, while she slept at her father's rental apartment Thanksgiving of 2003, and how her only child would be graduating high school this year; what a tragic loss on so many levels.

Dena says:

*"Words cannot adequately express the magnitude of such a loss, and how to this day it continues to devastate me. This event rocked our community, spreading the word to hundreds of people who were completely unaware of such a danger lurking in their own homes. Detectors flew off the shelves of local stores. People in our community were now armed with powerful information; knowledge that could save their lives and the lives of their loved ones. What an example my situation provided."*

My story, though not the same, shares Dena's pain. Four years ago, almost to the day, my brother and his friends began renovating a house. My brother had a great day – he had asked for and gotten a raise, opened his first bank account and paid for his membership at BJ's in anticipation of purchasing "toilet paper and stuff" for his new place. He never knew that his breaths were numbered, all because of a danger he couldn't sense.

We gauge a life by the breaths we take, from the first to the last. We captivate an audience by taking their breath away. We breathe quickly when we experience our first kiss. We wait with baited breath for a loved one to return from war. But do any of us really think about the simple gift of a single breath?

Change and legislation are both reactionary. It is rare we think of a problem before it ever happens. Seat belts were required only after accidents took countless lives needlessly. A small strap of fabric proved to be the difference between life and death. I come to you imploring for a small device to act accordingly for those in our state.

HN 2031 isn't frivolous or costly. It doesn't change the daily lives of your constituents in any way they would notice. It just protects them on the very base level: assuring air they breathe is not silently poisoning them.

We fit homes with smoke alarms. We protect our families and ourselves from a danger we can sense. We see and hear the flames, feel the heat, smell and taste the smoke. With carbon monoxide, there are no such indicators. There is no warning. As a mom, many a night I have been tired, or had a headache. I never would suspect a CO leak in my home. I never would worry that an air conditioning unit may be installed incorrectly, or a furnace was leaking. Families all over Pennsylvania, indeed all over the country, share a sorrow that can never be eased, but the embers of our shared pain have sparked a flame that cannot be squelched without legislation.

How many children must lose a mother? How many mothers must lose their only son? How many families must suffer this ache? How many must die for action to take place? I have been speaking on this issue for over two years. This bill enacts a change as vital as smoke detectors and seat belts. This is a simple matter of requiring people to protect themselves and others who enter their homes. It is the act of protecting those who may not even know they are in danger.

I started the Four Friends Memorial with the goal of getting as many people protected by a CO detector as possible. You have the ability to make this dream a reality. Don't let Michael Hopkins, Salvatore Facciponte III, Michael McGovern and Steven Larson die in vain. Let their legacy be the breaths of those saved by this law.

Thank you for inviting me to speak, and for considering this imperative legislation.