

Testimony
House Bill 1329
House Transportation Committee
Friday, February 1, 2013
North Dakota Department of Health

Good morning, Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Terry Dwelle. I am the State Health Officer for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here to testify on House Bill 1329.

House Bill 1329 will update the North Dakota child passenger safety law to better reflect what the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends.

Our department receives many calls each week from the public. Parents are often confused about the difference between what is the safest practice for their children versus what is legal. Current law states that seat belts can be used by children 7 years of age or older. To be safe, a child needs to be 4 foot 9 inches tall to use a lap-shoulder seat belt. If they are less than that height, the shoulder strap often crosses the neck versus the chest and the lap portion commonly covers the abdomen versus the pelvis. In a crash, these situations can result in spinal cord or other organ injuries and can result in severe complications and death. Children ages 4-8 in booster seats are 45 percent less likely to sustain injuries in crashes than kids restrained by seat belts alone.

As per growth chart information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average American child measures 4 foot 9 inches tall between 10-11 years of age. There is quite a bit of variation based on location, genetics and even gender; therefore, the American Academy of Pediatrics feels that a good general recommendation on the transition from booster seats to lap-shoulder seat belts would be somewhere between 8 and 12 years of age. A study conducted years ago from the National Center for Health Statistics demonstrated that children in the Midwest may be up to an inch taller than the national average. A transition at 9 years of age from booster to regular lap-shoulder seat belts may be reasonable.

This completes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any question you may have.