



AAA-The Auto Club Group
4950 13th Ave. S., Ste. 15
Fargo, ND 58103-7268

(701) 893-3759
eladoucer@acg.aaa.com

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Senator David Clemens
State Capitol
600 E. Boulevard Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58505

Chairman Clemens and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

On behalf of AAA – The Auto Club Group and our 69,000 members in North Dakota I'm writing to express support for SB 2121, which would allow primary enforcement of the state's seat belt law.

There is no disputing the effectiveness of seat belts. Even those who don't routinely wear them admit they would buckle up if they knew they would be involved in a crash. And when it comes to motor vehicle crashes, teens are greatly overrepresented and would benefit significantly from this legislation.

As you know, North Dakota currently has a primary seat belt law for teens under the age of 18. It has been rendered largely ineffective, however, by the secondary nature of the offense for those 18 years of age and older. Law enforcement officers simply do not know how old a driver is when encountering them in traffic. Knowing this teens are undeterred and have become the age group least likely to buckle up.

That issue can be solved with sound evidence-based policy, which includes allowing for primary enforcement of the law for all ages. It may also help parents enforce household rules. According to an NDSU study, more than 99 percent of parents expect their teens to wear a seat belt at all times. Yet, several studies and a review of the data paint a different picture. As a result, young lives are being cut short or significantly altered due to serious injuries.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of injury-related death for North Dakota teens, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Teen driver inexperience, coupled with immaturity, often results in risk-taking behaviors such as speeding, alcohol use, and not buckling up – all of which contribute to an increased death rate.

Through education, enforcement and sound policy, we can increase seat belt use in North Dakota and reduce the unnecessary loss of life and the personal and economic toll traffic crashes have on everyone. Stemming the tide of crash fatalities and serious injuries starts with embracing a culture of safety. And for each of us that begins before even putting the vehicle in gear -- by buckling up. It is a life-saving habit best established at a young age and continued through adulthood.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to express support for this important measure and urge a "Do Pass" recommendation by the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene LaDoucer".

Gene LaDoucer
Public Affairs Director

AAA-The Auto Club Group (ACG) is a membership based, non-profit corporation operating in fourteen states and two US Territories. It is one of the largest American Automobile Association (AAA) clubs in the United States with approximately 14 million members. ACG provides travel, insurance, automotive, and financial services to its members. In North Dakota, AAA – The Auto Club Group serves more than 69,000 members and works to represent the interests of members and the traveling public in the state legislature.