



**To:** House Criminal Justice Committee  
**From:** Kara Hitchens, Manager, Public and Government Affairs, AAA Club Alliance  
**Date:** June 18, 2024  
**Re:** Support of House Bill 536 (Making seat belt and booster seat violations a primary offense)

Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on **House Bill 536**.

I am Kara Hitchens, Manager of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Club Alliance, speaking on behalf of all the AAA Clubs in Ohio. Since AAA's founding in 1902, the not-for-profit, fully tax-paying organization has been a leader and advocate for the safety and security of all travelers. AAA proudly serves over 2.5 million members in Ohio. On behalf of the AAA Clubs in Ohio, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer support for this legislation.

**House Bill 536** is aimed at making road travel safer. One of the safest and easiest choices drivers and passengers can make to practice safety inside a vehicle is to buckle up.

If enacted, Ohio would join 35 states across the US to have a primary seat belt law. And all but one (PA) of Ohio's neighboring states have primary (vs. secondary) seat belt laws.

In 2023, of the 252,000 crashes reported to the Ohio State Highway Patrol, 49,768 of those crashes were unbelted. And sadly, of the 1,150 recorded fatalities, **nearly half**, 570 were unbelted.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), seat belts are the single most effective means of reducing the risk of death in a crash. Its data shows that front seat belt use decreases the risk of fatal injuries by 45 percent and the risk of moderate to critical injury by 50 percent for passenger car occupants.

Many Americans understand the lifesaving value of the seat belt – the national use rate was 91.9% in 2023, according to NHTSA. But sadly Ohio is among the 10 states with the lowest seat belt use at 80.8% in 2022.

Vehicle production has made many advances over the years. I remember the days of the automatic seatbelts introduced in 1975. And by 1998, all new cars were required to have air bags. Research and data have proven more safety tools working together makes car travel safer

and each of the safety features is designed to work in concert to protect passengers. In fact, I call them safety belts because they are a safety feature.

**We respectfully urge your support of the bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on this matter and I am happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.**

Respectfully,

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