

Ohio Insurance Institute Testimony in Support of House Bill 536

*Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee
Tuesday, June 18, 2024*

Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee – thank you for the opportunity to be here today to offer testimony in support of House Bill 536.

My name is Dean Fadel and I serve as President and CEO of the Ohio Insurance Institute (OII). The Ohio Insurance Institute is a member-driven trade organization which serves as the lead advocate for the property and casualty insurance industry in Ohio. Collectively, OII represents approximately 50 independent companies and related organizations across the state.

I want to start today by congratulating you. Thanks to the good work of this committee and the Ohio General Assembly, lives have been saved and Ohio's roads are safer. Your passage of Ohio's strengthened distracted driving laws have already reduced distracted driving by more than eight percent in just the first year, and we thank you.

As an industry, Ohio's property and casualty insurers strive to work closely with our partners in government on road safety issues and we care deeply about reducing significant dangers to the public. House Bill 536 will go a long way in doing just that – and save substantial amounts of money in the process.

But first let me say, for the **vast** majority of Ohioans – approximately 80 percent, in fact – absolutely nothing about their driving habits will change. So, I'm going to focus on the 20 percent who do not wear their seat belt and the impact they have on the state as a whole.

One of the most common arguments we hear against the proposal laid out in House Bill 536 is that the decision to wear a seat belt is a matter of personal freedom. If you decide not to wear a seat belt, the only person impacted is you, right? On the surface, that argument seems logical, but when you look deeper into the data, you'll find very different results.

The truth is, when someone chooses to not wear their seat belt, we all pay the price.

As I just mentioned, approximately 20 percent of Ohioans do not wear their seat belts on a regular basis, but, according to Ohio Department of Public Safety data, **more than 60 percent of traffic fatalities involved someone not wearing a seat belt**. And we know that crashes involving fatalities and serious injuries are the most costly, both personally and financially.

According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#), since 1975, trillions of dollars in unnecessary societal harm has been incurred due to seat belt nonuse nationwide. At current usage rates, seat belt nonuse will continue to cost Americans an estimated \$78.5 billion annually. These costs include lost quality of life, medical care, lost productivity, and other injury-related costs.

Breaking that down, Ohioans will bear at least \$2.8 billion of that amount. However, [the Buckeye State currently ranks 40th nationally in seat belt use](#) and has a significantly higher seat belt nonuse rate than the national average. Therefore, it's reasonable to assume that more unbelted crashes are occurring in Ohio, and we're likely paying a larger portion of those costs.

This begs the question: who is footing the bill?

According to the NHTSA, 54 percent of crash costs are paid by private insurers. Another 14 percent is paid by other sources such as charities, health care providers, and uninvolved motorists delayed in traffic. The remaining 9 percent is paid by public revenue through tax-subsidized emergency services.

This leaves 23 percent paid by crash victims, meaning those not directly involved in crashes pay 77 percent of the total cost, primarily through insurance premiums, taxes, and traffic congestion related costs. These costs are driven higher by the approximately 20 percent of Ohioans who choose not to wear a seatbelt and are involved in the majority of the most serious and costly crashes.

Put another way, every Ohioan – including those who wear their seat belt – pays for those who don't.

Ohioans pay some of the lowest auto insurance premiums in the country, but as we all know, they are still on the rise. Many factors go into the cost of insurance – some that are within our control, and some that are out of our control. But one thing that is undoubtedly within our control is seat belt use.

Primary enforcement of seat belt laws has been proven to reduce the number of unbelted drivers and crash deaths. Right now, we have a real opportunity to contain unnecessary costs, restore some economic freedom to all Ohioans, and – let's not forget – save lives.

The OII and our members commend Reps. Cross and Miller for sponsoring this legislation. We know that getting it across the finish line is going to be hard, but do you know what's even harder? Being the first responder who has to make the notification to the family of a loved one who died in a crash because they weren't wearing their seat belt. Strengthening our distracted driving laws wasn't easy - but it was worth it – and strengthening our seat belt laws will be too.

On behalf of the OII and our member companies, we ask that you support this proposal to make seat belt violations a primary offense and encourage swift passage of House Bill 536.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important legislation, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

When someone chooses to not wear their seat belt, we all pay the price.

In Ohio, the minority of people contribute to the majority of costs in auto crashes

- Approximately 80% of Ohioans wear their seat belts on a regular basis.
- That means about 20% of Ohioans don't wear their seat belts on a regular basis.
- Yet OVER 60% of traffic fatalities in Ohio involved someone not wearing a seat belt.
- Crashes involving fatalities and serious injuries are the most costly.

Source of Payment for Auto Crash Costs

- 54% paid by private insurers
- 23% paid by crash victims
- 14% paid by charities, health care providers, uninvolved motorists delayed in traffic
- 9% paid from public revenue (tax-subsidized emergency services)

Those not directly involved in crashes pay 77% of the total cost.

Sources:

Columbus Dispatch, May 7, 2024, You could get pulled over for not wearing a seat belt in Ohio if new bill becomes law; Ohio State Highway Patrol Safety Belt Dashboard 2019-2021
National Highway Safety Traffic Administration,
The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised), p. 2, 215

