

Testimony in favor of House Bill 2157

Chairman Proehl and Members of House Transportation Committee:

My name is Darlene Whitlock. I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee.

I am an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and Education Specialist, who worked in the Emergency Department for many years. I am here representing the Kansas Emergency Nurses Association (KENA), the Kansas State Nurses Association (KSNA) and as a member of Safe Kids Kansas coalition. The approximate 1500 members from those organizations would like to add their support to this important piece of legislation, funding the Seatbelts Are For Everyone (SAFE) program. We believe increasing the fine for lack of seatbelt use is also a measure for public health.

Unfortunately, nurses from across the state have seen the devastating injuries and even death that is associated with teens involved in motor vehicle crashes. We believe these injuries could be significantly reduced if they were educated on the importance of wearing seatbelts. We appreciated the enactment of the Graduated Driver License legislation and the resultant decrease in teen deaths. HB 2157 is consistent with that injury prevention focus. Perhaps, if wearing a seatbelt becomes a consistent behavior in teenage years, they will continue it as they grow older.

There is Kansas specific evidence to show that the SAFE Program improves seatbelt use through a cooperative effort from the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office, law enforcement and high school students themselves. This nationally recognized program has changed the culture in 118 high schools and their communities. By assuring funding on a consistent basis, the program will be able to sustain and expand to more schools.

Care that even the most educated and dedicated nurses give, does not compare to the benefit of a teen not being injured. One of the most difficult tasks we have is seeing serious injury and even death that could have been prevented.

Thank you for opportunity to speak, I would be happy to answer any questions.