



House Office Building, 9 South  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Phone: 517/373-6466

## GRANT PROGRAM; CHILD CAR SEAT SAFETY

### Senate Bill 661as passed by the Senate First Analysis (6-8-00)

**Sponsor: Sen. Mike Rogers**  
**House Committee: Appropriations**  
**Senate Committee: Families, Mental Health  
and Human Services**

#### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Each year about 1,800 children age 14 and under are killed as occupants in motor vehicles, and more than 280,000 are injured. According to the National Safe Kids Campaign, motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 14 and under, despite a nine percent decline in the overall motor vehicle occupant death rate for the decade between 1987 and 1997. Further and during the same time period, the motor vehicle occupant nonfatal injury rate among children increased by four percent. Motor vehicle crashes continue to kill and seriously injure children, despite the fact that all states have child occupant protection laws.

Child safety and education efforts have been underway during the past decade. For example, in 1996 the National Safe Kids Campaign partnered with General Motors Corporation (GM) to develop and implement the Safe Kids Buckle Up program, in an effort to improve children's safety when they are passengers in motor vehicles. The child passenger safety initiative provides hands-on instruction to parents and care givers through hundreds of Car Seat Check Up events hosted by state and local Safe Kids Coalitions and GM dealerships. Since July 1997, state and local Safe Kids coalitions have conducted more than 650 car seat check up events nationwide, trained over 6,000 community members, and educated more than 1,200 GM dealership employees. Car seat check up events utilize a formal protocol in which trained child passenger safety specialists inspect the car seats of participant families to ensure proper installation and use.

In February 1999, the National Safe Kids Campaign and GM published a report entitled "Child Passengers at Risk in America", in order to explain the misuse of children's car safety seats. The report indicates that car seats, when correctly installed and used, are extremely effective in saving children's lives since they reduce

the risk of death by as much as 71 percent for infants. However, the report summary also indicates that studies show four out of five car seats (80 percent) are installed or used incorrectly. Factors contributing to misuse include a variety of age and size requirements, incompatible vehicle and car seat designs, improper positioning of the seats, and inadequate child occupant protection laws.

Despite many campaigns to promote the use of safety belts and car seats for young passengers, more can be done. Some have proposed that a grant program be funded by the State of Michigan, in order to continue and expand the proper use of safety seats so they will be correctly installed and afford their full protection to children.

#### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

Senate Bill 661 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.710g) to require the Department of Community Health to establish a child car seat safety grant program for the purpose of providing grants for training, promotion, and education concerning the child restraint system use requirements under the vehicle code. (The code requires that a child under four be in a child restraint system, regardless of where he or she is seated.)

Under the bill, the program would have to provide grants to those the Department of Community Health considered eligible. Further, the bill would require the legislature to appropriate \$300,000 from the general fund to fund the child care seat safety grant program. The department would be required to promulgate rules under the Administrative Procedures Act to implement the bill, including, but not limited to, rules that would set eligibility standards for the award of a grant.

#### ***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

Information about the National Safe Kids Campaign, including its child passenger safety initiative, can be found at <http://www.safekids.org/buckleup/study.html>.

### ***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

The House Fiscal Agency notes that Senate Bill 661 would appropriate \$300,000 to fund a program to provide grants for training, promotion, and education concerning vehicle child restraint systems. Indeterminate savings may result from successful educational efforts to increase the proper use of child restraint systems for children under age four. When a motor vehicle accident occurs, an unrestrained child or a child restrained improperly in a child restraint system is at higher risk of greater injury or death than a child properly restrained, with high medical costs for treatment. A grant program providing education may contribute to a greater percentage of young children being properly restrained in a child restraint system that meets current government regulations, is properly installed in a vehicle, and is free of damage that could cause it to be defective. (6-8-00)

### ***ARGUMENTS:***

#### ***For:***

According to the Safe Kids Campaign, car seats when correctly installed and used are extremely effective in saving children's lives, reducing the risk of death by as much as 71 percent for infants, and by 54 percent for children age one to four. Although the campaign's report estimates that more than 70 percent of child passengers are restrained when riding, it also indicates that some studies demonstrate up to 80 percent of children's safety seats are improperly installed. Given recent child death and injury data, more educational and training should be undertaken to ensure safety seats are properly installed. In 1997, 1,775 child-occupants of cars, age 14 and under, died in motor vehicle crashes. Children age four and under accounted for 34 percent of these deaths. In 1998, more than 274,000 children age 14 and under were injured as occupants in motor vehicle-related crashes. Children age four and under accounted for nearly 30 percent of those injured. Many of these deaths and injuries could be prevented with broader and more effective training and installation programs designed to inform those who transport young children.

#### ***Against:***

This is a public awareness and educational safety campaign that has great merit. However, it should not be subsidized by state funds since it promotes private business purposes.

#### ***Against:***

The effectiveness of child restraint seems uncertain. According to the Senate Fiscal Agency analysis dated 5-16-00, in 1994, the number of deaths in car crashes of children under five years who were restrained was 11, while the number of those unrestrained was 14.

#### ***Response:***

The Safe Kids campaign estimates that nationwide nearly 300 children age four and under were saved as a result of child restraint use in 1998. If all child passengers age four and under were restrained, the campaign estimates that an additional 173 lives could be saved, and 20,000 injuries could be prevented, annually.

### ***POSITIONS:***

There are no positions on the bill.

Analyst: J. Hunault

---

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.