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**THE MINNESOTA CHILD PASSENGER  
RESTRAINT AND EDUCATION ACCOUNT**

A Report To The Minnesota Legislature  
On Activities And Expenditures  
As Required By The 1994 Session Laws,  
Chapter 635, Section 15  
As Contained In M. S. 169.685, Subdivision 7.

*Prepared by:*

**Office of Traffic Safety  
Department of Public Safety**

**January 31, 2003**



# THE MINNESOTA CHILD PASSENGER RESTRAINT AND EDUCATION ACCOUNT

## INTRODUCTION

The passage of Chapter 635, Section 15 of the session laws of 1994, amended Minnesota Statute 169.685 (Seat belts and Passenger Restraint Systems for Children) by adding Subd. 7 to the statute.

Subd. 7. Appropriation: special account; legislative report. The Minnesota child passenger restraint and education account is created in the state treasury, consisting of fines collected under subdivision 5 and other money appropriated or donated. The money in the account is annually appropriated to the commissioner of public safety, to be used to provide an education program on the need for and proper use of child passenger restraint systems. The commissioner shall report to the legislature by February 1 of each odd-numbered year on the commissioner's activities and expenditure of funds under this section.

This report has been written in response to the bill's requirement. These funds play an essential role in bringing education and child restraints to families in need, across the state of Minnesota. Considering the costs related to death and acquired injury from traffic crashes, which is the leading cause of death and injury to children under the age of 15,<sup>1</sup> this "ounce of prevention" is worth its weight in gold.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Child Car Seats

Minnesota Statute 169.685 requires all drivers to correctly place children under the age of four in child car seats. There are three kinds of seats that may be used to cover this age range. Infant car seats are designed only for infants up to 20-22 pounds in weight; the seat reclines up to 45 degrees and faces the rear of the vehicle. Convertible car seats can be used for infants and children up to 40 pounds in weight. When convertible seats are used for infants, they recline up to 45 degrees and are placed facing the rear of the vehicle. For children over 20 pounds and over one year of age, the convertible seat may be placed facing forward. Car seats that only face forward may be used by children who are at least one year of age and over 20 pounds. Most seats that face forward have a maximum harness weight limit to 40 pounds, and some of these seats may be converted for use as a belt positioning booster seat to a 40+ pound weight limit.

Minnesota Statute 169.685 does not address placing children over age four in belt positioning booster seats, but best practices in child passenger safety require the Minnesota Child Passenger Safety Program to address the needs of children in the age group 4 through 8 years. The children in this age group cannot properly use an adult seat belt, and are therefore at grave risk if moved from a child restraint directly into an adult

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control, 1998



seat belt. Because we are aware of the vulnerability of these children in traffic crashes, we have made belt positioning booster seats available on the grant application.

Convertible car seats and forward-facing only car seats manufactured after September 1, 1999, are required to meet stricter head excursion limits. Most manufacturers will meet this requirement with the use of a tether strap. The tether adds stability, reduces head excursion, and helps to secure a child restraint more tightly. Additionally, model year 2001 automobiles are required to provide the LATCH system in two seating positions. The LATCH system consists of two small bars located in the vehicle seat crack, and a tether anchor location. Use of these three attachments with a compatible car seat allows the user to by-pass the seat belt system, effectively anchoring the child seat to the vehicle. Beginning September 1, 2002, all car seat manufacturers are required to produce car seats that have LATCH attachments allowing the car seat to be installed into a LATCH compatible vehicle.

Progress continues to be made by car seat manufacturers in designing user-friendly seats, yet chances are extremely high that someone trying to install a seat without careful reference to both the car seat and vehicle manuals will make a mistake that compromises the effectiveness of the seat. Most parents and caregivers believe they have installed their car seats properly. However, in Minnesota, only 35% of observed car seats have been properly installed.<sup>2</sup> The gap between perception and reality highlights the need for vigorous education campaigns and access to free car seats for families in financial need.

When used correctly, child seats reduce the chance of death by 70% for infants less than one year old and by 54% for toddlers from the age of one through four.<sup>3</sup> As previously cited, traffic crashes are the leading cause of death and acquired disability of children and teens. The correct use of car seats can make a great difference in the quality and length of life for Minnesota's children.

## **CURRENT INFORMATION**

### **Activities and Expenditures**

The Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) within the Department of Public Safety administers federal, state, and community traffic safety monies. The OTS's Minnesota Child Passenger Safety Program addresses child passenger safety issues in Minnesota. Funding can be used to sponsor and promote training, education, public information, and car seat distribution programs.

The funds in the Child Passenger Restraint and Education Account are dedicated to the purchase of child car seats for families in need and to supply funds to pay for instructors who train additional advocates around the state. The OTS uses a competitive bid process to select a car seat manufacturer from which to purchase seats with monies from this account. Because we have seen such a great need for the actual car seat, we continue to

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<sup>2</sup> 2002 calendar year check-up event and fitting station observations

<sup>3</sup> Weber, K. Crash Protection for Child Passengers, *UMTRI Research Review* 31:2-3 (2000)



use all of the funding to purchase car seats and use other funding streams to supplement the education and training efforts.

In the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2001, the OTS expended \$92,487.12. This represents 1,180 convertible car seats and 1,184 forward-facing car seats/belt positioning boosters. Trained child passenger safety advocates distribute these seats and provide an educational and demonstration session.

Thus far in state fiscal year 2003, the OTS has made awards to 48 agencies. Awards represent 764 convertible seats, 556 forward-facing seats that will convert to belt positioning booster seats, 171 no-back belt positioning booster seats, and 336 high-back belt positioning booster seats. The funding from this program has played a significant role in encouraging counties to promote child passenger safety awareness, and to devote staff resources to this issue.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

OTS has asked some of the agencies who have participated in this grant program to fax in a letter giving their perspective on the effectiveness of this program within their communities. The agencies were contacted because of their demographics in an attempt to demonstrate how far reaching this program is for the citizens of Minnesota. Please review the attached letters in the Appendix.

### **CONCLUSION**

Children continue to be at serious risk of death and injury from car crashes. Children most often die or are injured in a car crash because they:

- Were unrestrained
- Were in a restraint that was not installed or not installed properly
- Were graduated to a seat belt too soon and were ejected from the vehicle or injured by the vehicle seat belt
- Were using an inappropriate restraint

The funding provided through the Child Restraint and Education Account is essential to reach families in financial need by providing child seats and education. The opportunity to conduct outreach to these families and assist them in protecting their children is critical to raising healthy families. The death and disability suffered by children under the age of 15 in car crashes is a public health issue that can be addressed and remedied with education and equipment. Thank you for the continued opportunity to make these funds available to the most vulnerable of Minnesota's citizens.



## **APPENDIX**





**FAIRVIEW**

**University Medical Center—Mesabi**

Member of Range Regional Health Services

*Patti Klicka -  
651 297-4844*

January 30, 2003

**Patti Klicka  
MN Dept. of Public Safety-Traffic Safety  
444 Cedar Street, Suite 150  
St. Paul, MN 55101**

Dear Ms. Klicka:

Fairview Range Regional Health Services has been working on injury prevention and traffic safety for the past two years. We recognize that we can improve the lives of the people in our local communities by providing resources and education on topics important to their safety.

Child Passenger Safety (CPS) has been one of the projects we have taken very seriously. We live in an area that has experienced serious economic difficulties. Through a grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety we have been able to offer free car seats and education on CPS to low income families. We have anecdotal information that some of the child passenger restraints we have provided to families in need have prevented injury. Without these resources, many families would not have the ability to purchase a safe car seat. Children would either be riding unrestrained or in car seats that do not always meet safety standards, thereby putting them at risk.

We understand that difficult decisions need to be made in view of the State's current budget deficits. Reductions to Child Passenger Safety could end up being more costly in the long run due to the high cost of medical care to those children that are seriously injured in an accident. Children are our most precious asset – we can only hope that wise decisions continue to be made on their behalf.

As always, we appreciate the partnership with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. It has shown that working together has positive results. Child Passenger Safety has made a difference to our community and we look forward to our continued commitment to these programs.

Sincerely,

*Paula Stoddard RN*

**Paula Stoddard, R.N.  
Community Health Outreach Coordinator**



**FC  
PH****Fillmore County Public Health**

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Sharon Serfling, Director/CHS Administrator

January 29, 2003

Patti Klicka  
MN Dept. of Public Safety – Traffic Safety  
444 Cedar Street, Suite 150  
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Ms Klicka:

I have been a part of the Car Seat Distribution Program for Fillmore County Public Health since its start in 2000. Since that time, Fillmore County Public Health has distributed 119 free car seats to needy families. I truly believe that this program saves lives, and our children are healthier and safer because of it. With national statistics showing that 80% of car seats are either unsafe or installed incorrectly, a program whose purpose is the teaching of correct car seat installation is invaluable. In 2002, 54 car seats and boosters were distributed free of charge to residents of Fillmore County. Without the help of the state-sponsored car seat program, we would not have been able to provide all of the seats needed. This year, two of our participants were involved in vehicle accidents with their children. Fortunately, none of the children were injured, even though one of the vehicles was totaled when it rolled. The mother, who was driving this vehicle, stated that she was thankful that she had received our teaching on car seat safety, as her baby was snug and safe in its car seat during the accident.

This year, we received 18 infant/toddler seats and 12 booster seats from your program. This will account for 30 more children who will be safer while riding in their cars. During times of budget constraints, I feel that it is safe to say that we would not be able to offer this service without your help. This is one program that I know makes a difference. Please continue to support this program throughout the state. In a small county, such as Fillmore, 30 seats make a huge impact. Thank you again for your generosity in helping to make Fillmore County children safer.

Sincerely,

*Violet Kopperud RN, PHN*

Violet Kopperud, RN, PHN  
Well Baby Coordinator





# MAHUBE COMMUNITY COUNCIL, INC.

January 31, 2003

Attention: Patti Klicka  
MN CPS Program Coordinator  
Minnesota Department of Public Safety  
Office of Traffic Safety  
444 Cedar Street  
Suite 150  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-5150

To Who It May Concern:

Mahube Community Council, Inc. is a Community Action Agency that works with low-income families through a variety of programs in Becker, Mahanomen and Hubbard Counties in Minnesota. The Head Start Program and the Family Development Program see many families that either do not have proper car seats for their children or the car seats are not installed correctly. Four years ago Mahube Community Council, Inc. began a Car Seat Safety Program. Trained car seat safety instructors teach car seat safety education classes that parents must attend. After completing the education component, a car seat clinic is offered. At the clinics, a family brings their children, personal vehicle and present car seat for evaluation. If the car seat is not meeting the needs of the child, it is replaced with a new car seat. The parents are instructed in the proper installation of the car seat. The new car seats are made available through grants and community support. The program is so successful that it has been expanded every year to serve more families.

Many families that Mahube works with use car seats purchased at rummage sales, are not properly installed, or are not the proper size for the child. One family came to a clinic with their child's car seat belted to a wooden plank that was serving as the back seat in their vehicle. Staff issued a new car seat for the child and were able to find a used back seat to install in the vehicle. Families want to protect their children and this program helps parents do that.

Mahube Community Council, Inc. would not have the Car Seat Safety Program without the initial and continued support of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety - Traffic Safety. We know we are saving children's lives by providing education to parents about car seats, car seat installation and new car seats.

Sincerely,

Marcia Otte  
Family Development Director

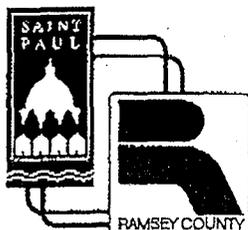
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January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003

Patti Klicka  
Minnesota Department of Public Safety  
444 Cedar Street, Suite 150  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

Dear Ms Klicka,

I am writing in support of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety State funded Child Safety Seat Education and Distribution Program. In the last three years, as a participant in this Program, we have been able to provide education and seats to nearly 200 children from low income families. Many, if not all of these children, may not have received a safe seat and/or the education on how to use it correctly.

In Minnesota from 1990 to 1999, Motor Vehicle Injury was the number one cause of death due to injury from ages 5 to age 54 years totaling the loss of 2573 Minnesotans. It ranked the number two cause of death for birth to age 4 and 55 to 85+ for another loss of 1161. This includes 154 children from birth to age 9 who should have been in protective child safety seats. It was the number one cause of injury death for all ages. In Minnesota in 2000, Motor Vehicle Injury was the 5<sup>th</sup> leading cause of Non-Fatal ED Treated Injury, and number 3 for Non-Fatal Hospitalized Injury. In Saint Paul, Motor Vehicle Injury was the second cause for EMS runs for children 0 to 14 years for years 1998 through 2001.

These statistics show that our very young residents in Minnesota are especially at risk for being in a car crash and need adequate protection. Some Minnesota Medical Assistance programs do help with providing car seats but they are limited to children up to age 4 or in some cases to children up to age 2. Some of these Programs do NOT provide an education component. The State Child Safety Seat Program allows us to supplement those programs and provide seats/education to children who can't get them through insurance.

As part of the Initiative for Violence-Free Families and Communities in Ramsey County, the Native American Community has given us "Wakanheza" or "Sacred Being", the Dakota word for child. Let us continue to protect our "Sacred Beings" by the State Child Safety Seat Program.

Sincerely,

Elaine Mazzitello, Public Health Nurse II

Injury Prevention Program Coordinator, Healthy Communities Section  
Saint Paul - Ramsey County Department of Public Health

