

05 - 0087

**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 26, 2005

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 15,¹ this "ounce of prevention" is worth its weight in gold.

Additionally, this is the only state government program that addresses the needs of low-income families transporting children safely. While there are a few donation programs and health care plans that address the need of transporting disadvantaged children safely, this program allows us to assist families that are low-income who do not meet the requirements of government assistance programs.

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.

¹ Centers for Disease Control, 2003

Minnesota Statute 169.685 does not address placing children over age four in belt positioning booster seats, but real world experience and 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 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.

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 25% of observed car seats have been properly installed.² 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.³ A belt positioning booster with a lap/shoulder seat belt reduces a child's risk of injury by 59%.⁴ 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, not to mention lowering the costs to society for disabled and deceased 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 seats, we continue to use all of the funding to purchase car seats and use other funding streams to finance the education and training efforts.

² Average taken from 2000 - 2003 calendar year check-up event and fitting station observations

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

⁴ Partners for Child Passenger Safety, *4 to 8 Year-old Children in Motor Vehicle Crashes* (2003)

Trained child passenger safety advocates distribute these seats and provide the needed educational and demonstration session. The education and demonstration class usually runs from 60 – 90 minutes. In state fiscal year ending June 30, 2003, the OTS 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. Expenditures totaled \$74,949.00

In state fiscal year ending June 30, 2004, the OTS made awards to 73 agencies. Awards represent 998 convertible seats, 912 forward-facing seats that will convert to belt positioning booster seats, 285 no-back belt positioning booster seats, and 475 high-back belt positioning booster seats. Expenditures totaled \$101,663.00.

NOTE: For state fiscal year 2004, the Minnesota Child Restraint & Education Account did not have enough funds to accommodate the near doubling of agency applicants from 2003 to 2004. Federal funds were used to expand the breadth of this project during 2004. Specifically, \$70,000.00 came from collected child restraint violations and \$31,663.00 came from federal 2003b funds.

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. Additionally, 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. 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, equipment and enforcement. Thank you for the continued opportunity to make these funds available to the most vulnerable of Minnesota's citizens.