

Massachusetts Prevent Injuries NOW! Network

May 17, 2009

Chairman James Timilty
Chairman Harold Naughton, Jr.
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Natalie's Bill: HB 2401/SB 1211

Dear Chairman Timilty:

As Chairman of the Massachusetts Prevent Injuries Now! Network (Mass PINN), I am writing to ask for your support for Natalie's Bill HB 2401/SB 1211, the primary seat belt legislation.

Mass PINN is a nationally recognized coalition of more than 50 public health and public safety organizations in Massachusetts devoted to reducing the amount and severity of injuries in the Commonwealth. As an organization we have identified primary belt use as a priority and an important step for the state to improve usage rates.

As you know, there are powerful incentives to pass Natalie's Bill. Primary belt usage laws are proven and effective means to prevent deaths and injuries. The seat belt use rate in Massachusetts is currently only seventy-four percent – ranking the state 48th in the nation. A change to Primary Enforcement is expected to increase belt use by at least ten points, saving 18 lives and preventing more than 650 serious injuries annually. These lives saved and injuries prevented translate directly to significant savings to the state – including \$170 million in health care and health care related costs. Further, there is added urgency as Massachusetts will receive \$13.6 million in federal funding if the bill is passed by June 30 and enacted by September 30.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of unintentional deaths in the United States. The easiest way to reduce the devastating impact of these deaths (and injuries) is to increase seat belt use by improving enforcement of seat belt laws – and primary enforcement laws are proven to do just that.

We are well aware of concerns regarding racial profiling and personal freedoms. It is important to note that research continues to show that seat belt

laws *do not* affect profiling. In fact, seat belt laws improve minority belt use more than average, further reducing racial disparities in crash fatalities. This is why primary enforcement is supported by many minority organizations like Meharry Medical College, and the National Conference of Black Mayors, and the Urban League.

With respect to personal freedom, it also important to point out that the deaths and injuries caused by non-belt use affect us all – not just the individual who decides not to fasten a belt. During a crash, unbelted occupants significantly increase the hazards to others inside a vehicle, add personal burdens on families, strain our first responders, doctors, hospitals and rehab professionals – the effect travels well beyond the individual. The weight of this personal choice is really carried by the rest of the Commonwealth.

We ask that you consider the tragic loss of Natalie DeLeon and what her death represents – from the devastating personal grief to the economic losses. Mass PINN is calling on you and your leadership: Please be associated with a positive change and send this bill out with a favorable recommendation.

Sincerely,



Sean E. Kane
Chairman MASS PINN

CC:

Senate Vice Chair, Michael Moore
House Vice Chair, Michael Brady
Senator Katherine Clark
Senator Mark Montigny
Senator James Welch
Senator Richard Ross
Representative Bruce Ayers
Representative David Torrasi
Representative Cleon Turner
Representative Linda Dean Campbell
Representative Brian Ashe
Representative James Dwyer
Representative Rhonda Nyman
Representative David Vieira
Representative Nicholas Boldyga