



News Release

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Highway Safety Officials Disappointed in Senate Transportation Bill *Record Safety Belt Use Rate is Threatened*

Statement for Attribution to Lt. Colonel Jim Champagne, Chair, Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA)

Today, the Senate Commerce Committee introduced legislation to reauthorize federal safety programs including state highway safety grant programs that address the behavior of drivers and other road users. GHSA members administer these programs.

GHSA appreciates the Senate enacting a reauthorization bill but is largely disappointed by its contents.

In particular, GHSA is disappointed that :

- There is no funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2005. It is unclear how state highway safety agencies will be able to fund their programs without authorization authority for the period June 1-September 30, 2005. The Senate bill only grants funding authority from October 1, 2005-September 30, 2009.
- The bill provides occupant incentive funding only if states have primary safety belt laws or reach 90 percent safety belt usage for two consecutive years. The majority of states will receive NO occupant incentive funding. This lack of funding severely threatens states' participation in the very effective annual Click it or Ticket Campaign which has resulted in a record high national safety belt usage rate of 80 percent . GHSA is disappointed that the Commerce Committee, like the Bush Administration, has apparently lost sight of the overall goal of occupant protection incentives—increasing safety belt use—not merely passing laws.
- The bill allows for ALL occupant incentive funding to be used for safety infrastructure programs. This is particularly surprising to GHSA given the Senate Environment and Public Works Bill, S. 732, doubles funding for safety infrastructure purposes. Allowing this funding to be used for safety infrastructure puts at risk funds that eligible states could use for safety belt enforcement efforts like Click it or Ticket.

There are a number of aspects supported by GHSA. These include:

- The overall funding levels for behavioral highway safety grant programs are significantly increase from current levels. Additional increases are also possible as the bill ties funding levels to possible future increases in the Highway Trust Fund revenue that are above the FY 2006 level.
- The bill requires the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to create one grant approval process with one application rather than numerous approvals as are currently required. GHSA is grateful, as this will allow states to spend more time on safety program implementation and less time on grant implementation. The bill also allows for the first time states to use funds for incentive grant program administrative purposes.
- The data improvement program that acknowledges the importance of safety data for state decision-making and provides resources for states to improve their data systems.
- The impaired driving incentive program that encourages states to focus on the most effective and significant countermeasures including sobriety checkpoints and judicial outreach.

In conclusion, GHSA urges the Senate to rethink its approach on the safety belt incentive program since more than half of the states will not currently qualify for funding. These states need resources to continue improving their safety belt use rates and save lives.

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The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) is the nonprofit association representing the highway safety agencies of states, territories, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Indian Nation. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans. For more information, contact GHSA at (202) 789-0942 or visit www.ghsa.org.