

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer today joined the National SAFE KIDS Campaign and SAFE KIDS Prince George's County in his district to call attention to National Child Passenger Safety Week (February 8-14), a nationwide child passenger safety initiative. In Maryland, 53 deaths to children and adolescents occurred from 2000 - 2001 as a result of motor vehicle crashes.

"Child Passenger Safety Week gives us an important opportunity to call attention to the alarming fact that motor vehicle crashes are the leading killer of children. This week should be a reminder to all of us about the importance of transporting our children safely every time they ride in a vehicle," said Hoyer. "I am proud to lend my support to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign in their effort to raise public awareness of this serious problem. I look forward to working with the Campaign and my colleagues in Congress to make Americans understand how to prevent these deaths and injuries in our communities," Hoyer concluded.

Today the National SAFE KIDS Campaign announced that 27 states, including Maryland, have upgraded their child occupant protection laws since 2001, with 23 states (up from only 2) now covering booster seat-aged children.

Maryland's improvements included requiring children ages 5 & under (regardless of weight) or weighing 40 pounds or less (regardless of age) to ride in an appropriate child safety seat. Children ages 6 - 15 will be required to use a safety belt. The law went into effect on October 1, 2003.

Closing the Gaps Across the Map: A Progress Report on SAFE KIDS' Efforts to Improve Child Occupant Protection Laws reviews improvements to child occupant protection laws since a study just three years ago found startling gaps in coverage related to age, seating position and lack of appropriate child safety seat use. While there have been dramatic strides in changing our laws, more than half of states still do not adequately protect booster-aged children.

The report states: "despite ongoing efforts to better protect child passengers in cars, motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 14 and under, claiming nearly 1,600 lives and resulting in close to 228,000 injuries each year. There is no dispute that child safety seats and safety belts, when used correctly and consistently, are extremely effective in saving lives and preventing injuries. Yet as many as 14 percent of children in the United States continue to ride completely unrestrained. Of

those who do buckle up, 4 out of 5 children are in restraints that are improperly selected, installed or used.”

“We know strong child passenger safety laws are a proven deterrent to the number one killer of kids, motor vehicle crashes. However, we’re disconcerted to know that the majority of states still don’t mandate that kids ride in booster seats,” said Heather Paul, Ph.D., executive director, National SAFE KIDS Campaign.

In 2001, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign launched a five-year initiative to improve state child occupant protection laws. For the past three years, SAFE KIDS coalitions and chapters have worked with government agencies, safety organizations, law enforcement agencies and state legislatures nationwide to close the gaps and strengthen child occupant protection laws.

In recognition of Child Passenger Safety Week, SAFE KIDS coalitions will host over 200 child safety seat check-up events, reaching an estimated 10,000 children across the country. Also, nearly 30 coalitions have been awarded legislative and enforcement grants totaling \$50,000 to partner with government agencies, state legislatures and enforcement agencies to strengthen or promote their child occupant protection laws. Congressman Hoyer has been a long-time partner with SAFE KIDS and has hosted numerous safety seat check-up events throughout his district. In June of last year, Hoyer hosted a check-up in Bowie where technicians inspected over 100 child safety seats.

Closing the Gaps Across the Map: A Progress Report on SAFE KIDS’ Efforts to Improve Child Occupant Protection Laws can be found at www.safekids.org. For more information about the SAFE KIDS BUCKLE UP program, visit the Web site or call the toll-free hotline at (800) 441-1888 to find a child safety seat check up event near you.

SAFE KIDS and General Motors are releasing video footage featuring a series of crash tests illustrating what can happen in a car crash when a child is placed in an adult safety belt. The footage will air on TV stations around the country. To view the footage, please visit www.gmability.com.

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