



**House Transportation Committee
HB 448 – Updating Car Seat Requirements for Infants
Testimony by Sandra McKay, MD
February 27, 2019**

Testimony submitted on behalf of:

Texas Pediatric Society, The Texas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Texas Medical Association
Texas Public Health Coalition

Good afternoon Chairman Canales and Committee Members,

My name is Dr. Sandra McKay and I am a complex care pediatrician from Houston and I am here testifying on behalf of the Texas Pediatric Society, the Texas Medical Association and the Texas Public Health Coalition. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 448 in an effort to keep all our smallest children safe on the road.

Nearly 1500 children younger than 16 die each year in the United States in motor vehicle crashes – half of whom were completely unrestrained.¹ While 1500 is way too many, this is significantly better than just two decades ago when approximately 3.5 child deaths occurred per 100,000 individuals. **Since the early 1990s an increased attention to age appropriate restraints, rear facing seating positions and enhanced child restraint laws have reduced the child fatality rate dramatically.** For instance, in the 9 years between 1999 and 2008, the number of US children younger than 15 years who died from car crashes dropped 45%. **In short, car safety seat restraints and laws to enforce safety seat best practices saves children's lives.**

Our organizations support HB 448 as it updates state law to nationally accepted and American Academy of Pediatrics endorsed best practices. A child who is younger than two years of age and does not exceed the recommended height and weight threshold should remain in a car seat that faces the rear of the car. However, the age of 2 is not a deadline, but instead a guideline. Children should remain in a rear facing car seat for as long as possible, but age 2 or growing out of the car seat should be at least the minimum. Nearly all currently available convertible seats can be used rear facing to at least 40 lb.²

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2011). Policy Statement – Child Passenger Safety. Retrieved from: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/03/21/peds.2011-0213.full.pdf+html>

² Retrieved from: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/03/21/peds.2011-0215.full.pdf+html>

In 2007, an article published in the *Injury Prevention Journal*³ states rear-facing car seats are not only protective in frontal crashes, but also side crashes for children 0-23 months. Children less than 2 years of age while facing forward in their car seats are not only more likely to be injured than rear-facing children during a motor vehicle collision, but also more likely to be seriously injured. **The article also states that children under age 2 are 75% less likely to die or be severely injured in a crash if they are riding rear-facing.** In 2013, the Child Passenger Protection Research Program at the University of Michigan Medical School published similar data. The shell – or back of the car seat – supports the head and distributes impact forces over a wide area to the infant’s strongest body region – the back. It also lets the head and torso move together, which prevents excessive stretching of the neck. If the same child were facing forward, the harness would restrain the torso, but the head and neck would pull and rotate forward, leading to the potential for serious upper spinal injury. There are many other research studies that duplicate this data.

As a parent, I use rear facing car seats to keep my children safe. As a primary care physician, I counsel my patients and families to do the same. It would be immensely helpful for state law to be clear and unambiguous on what age appropriate really means in discussions with parents during well-child visits. That way, those children never have to visit the emergency room.

Texas must update its child passenger safety standards to meet best practices and reduce childhood injury and fatality. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation.

³ Car safety seats for children: rear facing for best protection. *Inj Prev.* 2007; 13:6 398-402. Retrieved from: <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/13/6/398.full.pdf+html?sid=4393bf12-5d35-478e-a990-6eacec2a006e>