

Good morning Chairman Ruby and members of the Committee. My name is Chris Price and I am the Director of the Division of Emergency Medical Systems for the North Dakota Department of Health and also a paramedic. I am here to provide testimony on behalf of the North Dakota Department of Health in support of Senate Bill 2060.

I would like to ask you to take a moment and think about a motor vehicle crash, it might have been one you had first-hand knowledge of or one that you have heard about. Did something happen to you or someone you know that really didn't have to happen? How did that make you feel? Probably not very well. That's the same feeling that every Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) or paramedic has each time he or she attends a motor vehicle crash in which an occupant has succumbed to injuries while not wearing a seat belt. I can say after 33 years as a paramedic, that the feeling doesn't get any better. In fact, it has only become worse.

Seatbelts save lives - the facts are indisputable. I am confident that any EMT or paramedic standing before you would be able to share a story about a time when he or she cared for a belted crash victim in the presence of a lifeless, unbelted victim. In my case, I think about a crash that I responded to involving belted, front seat occupants, an unbelted rear passenger who was ejected, and a fuel leak and subsequent flash fire. The unbelted passenger who was ejected from the vehicle did not survive, while the belted, front seat occupants survived and were unharmed by the fire.

You may have heard, or may hear in additional testimony, about the financial and societal costs of unbelted crash victims. In addition, there is undoubtedly an emotional cost – not only to the victims' loved ones, but also to the EMS responders, the clear majority being community-spirited volunteers. Yes, any severe injury or loss of life weighs heavily on the minds of your friends and neighbors who respond with the local ambulance service, but I can assure you that the easily preventable injuries and deaths, like those that are the result of not wearing a seat belt, are the hardest to come to terms with.

Seat belts are the single most effective traffic safety device to prevent death and injury in a motor vehicle crash. (National Safety Council)

Seat belts protect you by:

- Keeping you in control of your vehicle if you are forced to swerve or brake suddenly by keeping you in the driver's seat.
- Keeping you in the vehicle. (You are 25 times more likely to be killed if you're thrown from a vehicle during a crash.)
- Spreading the force of impact over a large area and the strongest part of the body.
- Allowing your body to slow down gradually, lessening the impact on internal organs.
- Preventing impact with the interior of the vehicle, such as the steering wheel, dash or windshield.
- Preventing trauma to the brain and spinal cord caused by sudden change in motion.
- Increasing your chance of remaining conscious after a crash, which will help you get out of the vehicle and help others.

Wearing a seatbelt can prevent you from colliding with other occupants in the vehicle. An unrestrained occupant becomes a projectile and risks serious injury or death to others in the vehicle.

- Exposure to unbelted occupants increases the risk of injury or death to other occupants in the vehicle by 40 percent.
- In a frontal crash, an unbelted rear seat passenger sitting behind a belted driver increases the risk of fatality for the driver by 137 percent compared with a belted rear seat passenger. (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)

One death on North Dakota roads is too many. A primary seat belt law is an evidence-based strategy to help move North Dakota toward zero motor vehicle crash deaths. These deaths are preventable. To prevent unbelted motor vehicle deaths, everybody needs to wear a seat belt, every trip, every time.

The North Dakota Department of Health is pleased to be partnering with the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the North Dakota Highway Patrol on the Vision Zero initiative and is committed to reducing motor vehicle crash deaths and serious injuries to North Dakotans.

I urge you to pass SB 2060 to save the lives of North Dakotans. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.