



Statement of AAA New York State submitted to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the 2020-2021 Executive Budget Proposal for Transportation

Albany, NY – January 28, 2020

AAA New York State, an association of the five independent, not-for-profit AAA clubs in New York which collectively serve a membership of 2.8 million drivers, is pleased to submit testimony to the Joint Budget Hearing on Transportation for the 2020-2021 Executive Budget. We would like to thank the members and staff of the Assembly and Senate Transportation Committees, the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and the Senate Finance Committee for their work in organizing and holding this hearing.

Seat Belts for Adult Rear Seat Passengers

We commend the Legislature for recently passing the limo safety legislation, as well as expanding seat belt laws to taxis and liveries. However, there is more work to be done. AAA strongly believes it is critical to extend the seat belt law to all individuals 16 and over as well. We urge the Senate to include this requirement in their 1-house budget as they did last year, and we encourage the Assembly to do the same.

Proper restraints improve safety outcomes for all vehicle occupants, regardless of seating position or age. According to the Governor's Highway Safety Association, in 2018, 803 unrestrained rear occupants died in motor vehicle crashes. Over 400 could have survived if they had buckled up. In New York State, over the last decade, 300 people were killed and over 29,000 were injured while unrestrained in the back seat.

Education and enforcement campaigns have helped raise New York's front seat belt usage rate to 93% in 2018. But since New York's rear seat belt law only applies to children younger than 16, belt use in the back lags below this rate – with tragic consequences. Teens and young adults ages 16-24 die at a higher rate than any other age group when unrestrained in the backseat of a motor vehicle. The seat belt requirement should not expire when teens and young adults are most vulnerable. It is counterintuitive that the age when children are least likely to wear seat belts and most likely to be killed, is also the age when the requirement to wear a seat belt is lifted. A comprehensive seat belt law will help keep teenagers and young adults, as well as adults, safe on the road.

New York has an opportunity to reduce future fatalities and injuries on our roads and increase seat belt usage by passing a rear seat belt requirement for all individuals 16 and up as part of the SFY 2020-2021 Executive Budget.

Rear Facing Blue Lights

While AAA appreciates the Governor's initiative in Part C of the TED bill to enhance highway safety for all highway users by authorizing rear-facing blue lights for safety service patrol vehicles, we also believe this authorization should extend to tow trucks as well.

An analysis conducted by researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that the towing industry is 15 times deadlier than all other private industries combined. Specifically, motor vehicle tow operators have an annual fatality rate of nearly 43 deaths per 100,000 workers; while the annual fatality rate for all other U.S. private industries combined is 2.8 deaths per 100,000 workers.

An average of 23 tow operators are killed at the roadside every year. That translates to at least two tow operators killed every month while servicing vehicles.

AAA tow operators respond to nearly 30 million calls for help each year. Slow Down Move Over Laws (which are in place in all 50 states) are aimed at protecting emergency responders working along the roadside, requiring drivers to slow down or move over, to give safe clearance. It is our opinion that blue lights would enhance compliance with the Move Over Law and improve safety at the roadside.

On behalf of AAA New York State, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Legislature to continue New York's leadership on traffic safety initiatives.

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