

NEWS RELEASE

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Failure to pass seat belt law will cost state millions of dollars

Kansas will lose a one-time federal grant of at least \$11.2 million and an annual appropriation of nearly a half-million dollars if it doesn't have primary seat belt law in place by June 30.

The state is closer than it has ever been to enacting an all-ages, primary seat belt law after passage of Senate Bill 59 by the Senate on Feb. 19. But the bill, which has since moved to the House, is now at risk of not even being considered by that chamber.

"With our state economy in turmoil and revenue estimates regularly falling below expectations, this is no time to be walking away from millions of dollars that can be used for important improvements to our highways," said Secretary Deb Miller of the Kansas Department of Transportation.

The primary law would allow officers to stop a vehicle solely for a seat belt violation. The current law is primary for those under 18, but only secondary for all others, which means adult drivers cannot be stopped solely for a seat belt violation.

Kansas has a seat belt usage rate of about 77 percent, considerably lower than the 87 percent compliance rate of states that have a primary law. Based on the experience of other states, Kansas could expect to have a 10 percent increase in seat belt usage after passage of a primary law.

Two-thirds of those who die in traffic crashes in Kansas aren't wearing seat belts.

Under provisions of the federal transportation program set to expire this year, states that have enacted a primary seat belt law by June 30 receive a one-time payment from the federal government. Kansas will receive \$11.2 million if it passes a primary law and could receive more if other states forfeit their grant by failing to pass such a law. There are 23 states, including Kansas, that don't have such a law.

One million dollars of the grant must be used on behavioral education programs and the remainder can be used on highway projects. In addition, the state would receive \$465,000 annually for having a primary law.

“While the money is important, the real benefit of a primary seat belt law is that it will save about 30 lives and prevent 300 serious injuries each year,” Secretary Miller said.

“I don't buy the argument that not wearing a seat belt is somehow a matter of individual rights. Traffic fatalities and serious injuries cost all of us in the form of higher insurance rates and higher Medicaid and Medicare payments. In Kansas, these crashes cost each of us more than a thousand dollars a year. A primary seat belt law will save all of us money and save lives.”

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