



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

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DATE: March 11, 2015

TO: House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

FROM: Amy Joyce, Legislative Liaison

SUBJECT: HB 2837, seatbelt exemption authority for certain medical professionals

INTRODUCTION

ODOT's Transportation Safety Division authorizes safety belt exemptions, under current Oregon law, upon authorization of a physician. The bill would add nurse practitioners and physician assistants to those who may recommend the exemption. Safety belts continue to be one of the best ways to protect people from death in a vehicle crash, so exemptions should be granted only when necessary.

DISCUSSION

Safety belt use is a major factor in surviving a vehicle crash. The most recent statistics show that of all traffic fatalities among motor vehicle occupants in Oregon, 26 – 32% of those killed were unbelted. This is despite the fact that Oregon has an extremely high rate of safety belt use. For 2014, NHTSA (the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) found Oregonians use belts 97.75% of the time. Nationally, unbelted occupants are 30 times more likely to be ejected from the vehicle in a crash. Odds of surviving ejection from a vehicle: just one in five. Put simply, failing to wear a safety belt significantly increases the likelihood a person will die in a car crash.

Because of the importance of safety belt use, ODOT's Safety Division does not merely accept a person's request to be exempted from the safety belt law, even with the signature of a physician. Rather, a safety professional works with the customer making the request to find alternatives. The best approach is to educate the customer on proper adjustment of the safety belt system so that it can be made both comfortable and effective.

Adding nurse practitioners and physician assistants to those medical professionals who can certify to the appropriateness of the exemption recognizes the changed structure of the health care system. As is the case today with physicians, ODOT's Safety Division would encourage medical professionals to only certify to the exemption if it is necessary and the only option to accommodate the patient's condition.

SUMMARY

Safety belts remain one of the most effective safety tools on the highway. All vehicle occupants should be wearing proper restraints. Exemptions should be granted only as a last resort.