



ILLINOIS

Occupant Protection Program Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is the designated State Highway Safety Office for Illinois. The Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) is tasked with both the roadway safety programs funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) state funds and programs falling under the jurisdiction of the Federal Highway Administration. The Illinois Occupant Protection Program is a comprehensive initiative aimed at reducing traffic crashes, fatalities and injuries on public roads.

Illinois, in cooperation with NHTSA, initiated this comprehensive assessment of the Occupant Protection (OP) component of its highway safety program for Federal Fiscal Year 2026. This assessment is intended to guide the BSPE towards programmatic improvements intended to increase occupant protection use and decrease injuries and fatalities statewide.

Illinois is the 25th largest state in the nation by area, consisting of 57,914 square miles. Located in the Midwestern region of the United States, Illinois is bordered by Indiana to the east, Kentucky to the south, Missouri and Iowa to the west and Wisconsin to the north. It is the 6th most populous state in the country, with the United States Census Bureau estimating the population of Illinois to be 12,710,158 (January 5, 2025). Illinois ranks 12th in the nation in terms of population density with 232 people per square mile. The state capital is Springfield, in the center of the state, and the largest city is Chicago in the northeast.



Traffic fatalities in the United States decreased by 4.3 percent from 2022 to 2023 (42,721 to 40,901). Although the observed daytime seat belt use rate for the United States overall in 2023 was 91.9 percent, 49 percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed in traffic crashes in 2023 were unrestrained, based on known restraint use. The lack of proper restraint use therefore remains a serious highway safety, public health and societal issue. This is true in Illinois where in 2023, 46 percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed were unrestrained (based on known restraint use).

OP is the foundation of a sound traffic safety program and increased seat belt use can provide reductions in fatalities and injuries. Using a seat belt correctly is the single most effective thing people can do to protect themselves in the event of a crash. The national seat belt use rate was 91.2 percent in 2024 as estimated by NHTSA's National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS). Per Illinois' state seat belt use survey, the seat belt use rate decreased from 92.9

percent in 2023 to 92.4 percent in 2024, but increased to 93.0 percent in 2025. Illinois benefits from having a primary enforcement seat belt law, which enables law enforcement officers to stop vehicles and issue citations if a driver or passenger is not properly restrained.

Based on the fundamental elements of the Uniform Guidelines of State Highway Safety Programs for Occupant Protection, this assessment report identifies Illinois's strengths and challenges and provides recommendations for each of the following specific areas: Program Management; Legislation, Regulation and Policy; Law Enforcement; Communication; Occupant Protection for Children; Outreach; and Data and Evaluation.

The key recommendations in this report are recommendations the Assessment Team found to be most critical for improving the State's OP program. While Illinois has multiple initiatives in place to improve its program, there is always room for growth. All recommendations presented in this report are intended to help increase restraint use and save lives in Illinois.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The assessment team would like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of all the statewide partners, advocates, and stakeholders who took the time to contribute their knowledge and expertise during the assessment.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Illinois Department of Transportation Bureau Chief of Safety Programs and Engineering, Stephane B. Seck-Birhame, for his support, level of effort and commitment to occupant protection in Illinois. Special thanks goes to Illinois Department of Transportation Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Sarah Moore, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Rochelle Gillespie, and Administrative Manager, Allison Conn, for their passion and efforts in saving lives through occupant protection programs throughout Illinois, and their logistical and administrative assistance both in coordinating the assessment and making sure the overall process and needs of the team were met.

This assessment benefited from the guidance of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration headquarters and regional staff: Leah Scully and Kaci Wray, and support from their supervisors, Tara Kelley-Baker and Kari Kinnard.

Special recognition and appreciation also go to Danielle McNeill for her assistance throughout the assessment process and in producing this report.

Each member of the team appreciated the opportunity to have served on this assessment and hopes that consideration and implementation of the proposed recommendations will enable Illinois to continue to improve its occupant protection program.

Notes: The information included in this document has been collected from a variety of sources including interviews, official documents, websites and other materials. Sources may not be consistent. Some copyrighted material has been used under the “Fair Use” Doctrine of the U.S. copyright statute.

ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Occupant Protection (OP) program assessment is to provide Illinois with a review of its statewide OP program through identification of programmatic strengths, accomplishments, challenges, and recommendations for improvement. The assessment is a tool for OP program planning, development, and implementation purposes and for making decisions about how to best prioritize programs and use available resources.

The technical assessment is intended to:

- Provide an opportunity for open, non-threatening dialogue between the Illinois Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) and its partners;
- Assist with long-range planning;
- Assist with resource allocation;
- Identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement;
- Generate administrative and political support for program improvement; and
- Serve as a benchmark against which to measure future improvements.

All states, in cooperation with their political subdivisions, should have a comprehensive OP program that educates and motivates its citizens to use available motor vehicle OP systems. A combination of use requirements, enforcement, public information, education, and outreach is necessary to achieve significant, lasting increases in seat belt and child restraint use, which will prevent fatalities and decrease the number and severity of injuries.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) headquarters and regional office staff facilitated this OP Program Assessment. Working with the BSPE, NHTSA recommended a team of five individuals with demonstrated subject matter expertise in the areas of Program Management; Legislation, Regulation, and Policy; Law Enforcement; Communication; OP for Children; Outreach; and Data and Evaluation. The assessment team conducted the assessment based on the *Uniform Guidelines for State Highway Safety Programs, Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 20, Occupant Protection* (March 2025). The U.S. Department of Transportation developed the guidelines in collaboration with states to support technical guidance for states. The assessment followed the guidelines, and each section of this report reflects this guiding document.

The assessment consisted of a thorough review of State-provided OP program briefing materials and interviews with State and community-level program directors, coordinators, advocates, traffic safety partners, law enforcement personnel, and BSPE staff. The team convened to review and analyze the information presented, noting the OP program's strengths and challenges as well as recommendations for improvement. The recommendations provided are based on the unique characteristics of the State and what the assessment team members believe Illinois and its partners could do to improve the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of their OP activities. The conclusions drawn by the assessment team are based upon, and limited by, the facts and information provided in the briefing materials and by the various stakeholders who presented information to the

assessment team.

The assessment report is a consensus report and belongs to Illinois. This is not a NHTSA document. The assessment team recognizes the commendable and committed work conducted throughout Illinois in the area of occupant protection. It is not the intent of this report to thoroughly document all the successes, nor to give credit to the large number of individuals at all levels who are dedicated to traffic safety. By its very nature, this report focuses on areas that need improvement. The report should not be viewed as criticism. Rather, it is an opportunity to provide assistance and encourage improvements, which is consistent with the overall goals of traffic safety program assessments.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- **Fill the Occupant Protection Coordinator position.**
- **Develop and implement a process to incorporate an Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force to assist the Occupant Protection Coordinator in determining funding for potential occupant protection grantees and to assist in coordination of programs across the State. Include representatives from traditional and non-traditional organizations including local health departments and hospitals, schools, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, medical professionals, childcare, employers, faith based, insurance, media and at-risk.**

2. LEGISLATION/REGULATION AND POLICY

- **Fill the Occupant Protection Coordinator position.**
- **Enhance the Illinois child restraint law by requiring children under the age of 13 to be seated in the rear seat of the vehicle when rear seating positions are available.**
- **Provide education to judges handling traffic violations about the positive impacts from the use of seat belts and child restraints for the safety of the vehicle occupants.**

3. LAW ENFORCEMENT

- **Incorporate *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement* education into the basic curriculum at all Illinois police academies for new hires.**
- **Develop a law enforcement card with basic information on correct use of child restraint systems, the intricacies of the law, and best practice guidelines. Cards should be disseminated to every officer in the state.**
- **Implement that the Law Enforcement Liaisons visit all law enforcement agencies in Illinois to garner support for the law enforcement community in the furtherance of highway safety initiatives and to possibly recruit agencies to become grantees.**
- **Provide education to judges handling traffic violations about the positive impacts from the use of seat belts and child restraints for the safety of the vehicle occupants.**

4. COMMUNICATION

- Utilize the findings in both the observational seat belt use and other surveys, coupled with the crash data, to more acutely focus specific occupant protection projects and media to problem areas defined in the surveys as they relate to demographics, gender, vehicle type, and areas with lower use rates. Share this information through your grantee network and community partners for use with their local media, marketing, and social media platforms.
- Augment the monthly communications meeting to include not only Illinois Department of Transportation but by including outside partners to contribute to discussion on content and distribution of messages.
- Create a database of traffic safety advocates, including Child Passenger Safety Technicians, to enable the Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering, to easily share updates on activities, policy changes, upcoming campaigns, and event support requests. Consider distributing a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter with data and messaging, law enforcement statistics, and child passenger safety information that advocates can share on their social media platforms.

5. OCCUPANT PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN

- Implement a robust statewide mentorship and outreach approach to retain and recertify Child Passenger Safety Technicians, to ensure the capability to deliver child occupant protection safety programming statewide remains.
- Require all Illinois Department of Transportation supported Child Passenger Safety technicians and Local Agency Non-Enforcement Program grantees to use the National Digital Car Seat Check Form or the paper version of the National Digital Car Seat Check Form, with a requirement to enter all National Digital Car Seat Check Form forms to the website by the end of the federal fiscal year as a condition of grant funding.
- Require all law enforcement and Law Enforcement Liaisons to complete *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement*, a one-hour free course available online or in-person, presented by a Child Passenger Safety Technician.
- Create Child Passenger Safety and other Public Information and Education materials available for download and for print-on-demand in multiple languages. All media should incorporate Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility elements such as high-contrast design, readable font sizes, captioned video, and plain-language best practices.

6. OUTREACH PROGRAM

- **Challenge the State’s partners to develop a structure for the development of a statewide Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force with a mission of increasing the seat belt use rate and the correct and consistent use of child passenger restraints.**
 - **Include representatives from traditional and non-traditional organizations including local health departments and hospitals, schools, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, medical professionals, childcare, employers, faith based, insurance, AAA, media, and at-risk population.**
 - **Develop a comprehensive seat belt use strategic plan and calendar to comprise enforcement, media, and outreach including child passenger safety.**
 - **Identify times of the year to coordinate high visibility enforcement and corresponding media and outreach in communities to better harmonize efforts to achieve a higher seat belt use rate.**
 - **Concentrate on programming, outreach, enforcement, and messaging in areas of the State with the lowest seat belt use rate.**
 - **Evaluate existing programs including operations within the Child Passenger Safety Resource Centers and determine how to share and implement within all regions in the State.**

7. DATA AND EVALUATION

- **Generate reports from the Racial Profiling Prevention and Data Oversight Board to evaluate the potential of racial bias in traffic stops involving a seat belt violation.**

1. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

GUIDELINE:

Each state should have centralized program planning, implementation and coordination to achieve and sustain high rates of seat belt use. Evaluation should be used to revise existing programs, develop new programs and determine progress and success. The State Highway Safety Office (SHSO) should:

- *Provide leadership, training and technical assistance to other State agencies and local occupant protection programs and projects;*
- *Establish and convene an occupant protection advisory task force or coalition to organize and generate broad-based support for programs. The coalition should include agencies and organizations that represent at-risk populations and are critical to the implementation of occupant protection initiatives;*
- *Integrate occupant protection programs into community/corridor traffic safety and other injury prevention programs; and*
- *Evaluate the effectiveness of the State's occupant protection program.*

1A. STRENGTHS

- The Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) which is located within the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) serves as the lead agency for the Occupant Protection (OP) program. The BSPE has a position that is designated as the Occupant Protection Coordinator.
- The BSPE solicits proposals and awards grants to fund projects designed to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries resulting from traffic crashes. For the OP program the focus is on unbelted fatalities and serious injuries. Grant contract proposals are submitted to the BSPE by potential grantees following a prescribed process and deadlines.
- The BSPE grant contract applications for all local (non-State) agencies are typically due during the first quarter of the calendar year for the upcoming federal fiscal year.
- Starting with the 2027 grant cycle there will be a separate application announcement for occupant protection efforts and actions. Applications will require a formal project objective, a minimum of two performance measures, and a detailed budget.
- Monitoring is done to maintain control of a project, detect problems, identify changes or training needs, provide data for planning, evaluating, and creating an opportunity for the BSPE to provide technical assistance when needed. It is also a way to encourage accountability on behalf of the grantee. Monitoring requires forms to be completed for documentation and maintained in the file. The number of monitoring reviews depends on

various factors such as the funding amount; under \$50,000 is one monitoring visit and \$50,000 and above is two monitoring visits.

- The *2022-2026 Strategic Highway Safety Plan* (SHSP) lists Critical Emphasis Areas. Emphasis Area 1, Safe Behavior, includes a focus on reducing unrestrained fatalities and serious injuries through two Strategies:
 - Strengthen occupant protection laws and enforcement
 - Communication campaigns
- Regional groups, typically around child passenger safety programs, will coordinate efforts and share resources on an as-needed basis.
- The BSPE’s federally funded programs are included in the *Triennial Highway Safety Plan - Annual Grant Application* and the *Annual Report* for the most recent federal fiscal year. Additional funding comes from the Road Fund.
- The Grants Fund Balances Report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows that the majority of the federal funds currently available for programming by the BSPE are from fiscal year 2025 and 2026. There is very little or no carryforward funding in Section 402 or 405(b).

Table 1:1. Fiscal Year 2025 Occupant Protection Program Funding

FUNDING SOURCE	FISCAL YEAR 2025 - PROGRAM TITLE	FUNDING AMOUNT
Federal	Injury Prevention	\$1,347,130
Federal	Traffic Safety Survey	\$96,304
State	Child Passenger Safety Resource Center (CPSRC)	\$1,820,161
Federal	Occupant Protection Enforcement (Secretary of State)	\$81,583
Federal	Occupant Protection Enforcement (Illinois State Police)	\$1,101,071
Federal	CPSRC Underserved Communities	\$74,432
Federal	Occupant Protection Paid Media	\$680,773

Source: Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering - Illinois Department of Transportation

- The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) includes program areas for High-Risk Rural Roads and Older Drivers.

1B. CHALLENGES

- The Occupant Protection Coordinator position is currently vacant.

- Due to recent staffing changes and long-term vacancies, there are some procedures that have not been completed, such as project monitoring.
- An Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force, to assist in determining funding for potential occupant protection grantees and to assist in coordination of programs across the State, does not exist.
- The fines, fees, and penalties paid by unbelted drivers and other vehicle occupants are not used to support occupant protection countermeasures. The current process for allocating those funds is by an oversight body (legislature for the State, county commissions for their county, and city councils for their city) to determine where the fines, fees, and penalties are allocated.
- There are continual requests for child restraint system devices in certain regions and from families in need.
- The strategies identified in the unrestrained fatality and serious injury focus area of the SHSP were developed and approved with little or no involvement of the BSPE. Federal Highway Administration guidance states “When Congress required States to develop an SHSP, they did so because the process works. Bringing the various safety disciplines together to work jointly on the most serious traffic safety problems is making a difference”.
- The HSIP *Annual Report* includes a list of partners that help implement actions that are identified for the delivery of the program, but the BSPE is not listed as one of those partners.

1C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Fill the Occupant Protection Coordinator position.**
- Enroll the Occupant Protection Coordinator in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s Highway Safety Grants Management training and the Occupant Protection Program Management training to learn skills needed to fully manage and evaluate the occupant protection programs and other applicable training available through key stakeholders.
- Verify that the internal project grant documentation follows the same requirements and reporting as outlined in the *Policies and Procedures Manual*.
- **Develop and implement a process to incorporate an Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force to assist the Occupant Protection Coordinator in determining funding**

for potential occupant protection grantees and to assist in coordination of programs across the State. Include representatives from traditional and non-traditional organizations including local health departments and hospitals, schools, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, medical professionals, childcare, employers, faith based, insurance, media and at- risk.

- Create a statutory provision for earmarking all fines and fees for child safety seat citation fines, fees, and penalties to go to programs that support the purchase of child safety seats for low- or no-income families.
- Include all parts of the Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering in the discussions, decisions, and implementation of the *Strategic Highway Safety Plan* as expected in the Federal Highway Administration guidance.
- Include all parts of the Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering non-engineering program staff as a partner in the delivery of actions for the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

2. LEGISLATION/REGULATION AND POLICY

GUIDELINE:

Each state should enact and enforce occupant protection use laws, regulations and policies to provide clear guidance to the public concerning motor vehicle occupant protection systems. This legal framework should include:

- *Legislation permitting primary enforcement that requires all motor vehicle occupants to use systems provided by the vehicle manufacturer;*
- *Legislation permitting primary enforcement that requires that children birth to 16 years old (or the State's driving age) be properly restrained in an appropriate child restraint system (i.e., certified by the manufacturer to meet all applicable Federal safety standards) or seat belt;*
- *Legislation permitting primary enforcement that requires children under 13 years old to be properly restrained in the rear seat (unless all available rear seats are occupied by younger children);*
- *Graduated driver licensing laws that include three stages of licensure, and that place restrictions and sanctions on high-risk driving situations for novice drivers (i.e., nighttime driving restrictions, passenger restrictions, zero tolerance, required seat belt use);*
- *Regulations requiring employees and contractors at all levels of government to wear seat belts when traveling on official business;*
- *Official policies requiring that organizations receiving Federal highway safety program grant funds develop and enforce an employee seat belt use policy; and*
- *Encouragement to motor vehicle insurers to offer economic incentives for policyholders who wear seat belts and secure children in child safety seats or other appropriate restraints.*

2A. STRENGTHS

- The State of Illinois has done a thorough job in creating statutes to address all aspects of occupant protection in the Illinois Compiled Statutes (ILCS).
- Illinois' seat belt law includes the following components:
 - All drivers and passengers of a motor vehicle are required to wear properly adjusted and fastened occupant protection (OP) systems.
 - The fine for violating the seat belt law is \$25. There are additional court costs which brings the total financial sanction to over \$150.
 - The seat belt law permits primary enforcement.
- Illinois' *Child Passenger Protection Act* includes the following components:
 - Drivers are required to restrain children up to age eight in a child restraint system that meets Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 213.

- All children up to the age of two are required to use a rear-facing child restraint system until the child weighs 40 or more pounds or is 40 or more inches tall.
 - Children ages eight, up to the age of sixteen, are required to be properly restrained by a seat belt.
 - The fine for violating the child restraint system law is \$75 plus court costs. A second or subsequent violation is \$200 plus court costs.
 - The conviction of this offense is added to the violator's driver record.
 - The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is responsible for developing and providing a letter that is used by a Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST) when conducting a class for first-time violators of the child restraint systems law that is used in court when requesting a dismissal of the violation.
 - The child restraint system law provides for primary enforcement.
- Starting on July 1, 2023, a new child restraint system law was enacted that states a policy of automobile insurance must include coverage for replacement of a child restraint system that was in use by a child during a crash to which the coverage is applicable.
 - Beginning July 1, 2031, each designated seating position in any newly purchased school bus shall be equipped with a combination pelvic and upper torso seat safety belt system in good operating condition and meeting all applicable federal standards.
 - Illinois' Graduated Driver License (GDL) law includes three GDL levels in Illinois, as follows:
 - Permit Phase
 - Parent or legal guardian consent required to obtain an instruction permit.
 - Must be enrolled in an approved driver education course, and must pass vision and written tests.
 - Nighttime driving restrictions - Sunday through Thursday, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.; and Friday to Saturday, 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. (local curfews may differ).
 - Permit must be held for a minimum of nine months.
 - Must practice driving a minimum of 50 hours, including 10 hours at night, supervised by a parent or adult age 21 or older with a valid driver license.
 - Must not acquire any driving convictions during the nine-month permit phase.
 - Number of passengers limited to one in the front seat and the number of seat belts in the back seat.
 - All occupants must wear seat belts.
 - Cell phone use while driving including a hands-free device, is prohibited for drivers under age 19, except in the case of an emergency.
 - Texting while driving is prohibited.

- Permit is valid for up to two years.
 - Initial License Phase
 - Parent or legal guardian must certify that a minimum of 50 hours of practice driving, including 10 hours at night, has been completed.
 - Parent or legal guardian must accompany teen to provide written consent to obtain a driver's license, or complete and notarize an *Affidavit/Consent for Minor to Drive* form.
 - Must have completed a State-approved driver education course.
 - Nighttime driving restrictions - Sunday through Thursday, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.; and Friday to Saturday, 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. (local curfews may differ).
 - Must maintain a conviction-free driving record for six months prior to turning 18 before moving to the Full Licensing Phase. A traffic conviction during the Initial Licensing Phase may extend restrictions beyond age 18.
 - All occupants must wear seat belts.
 - For the first 12 months of licensing, or until the driver turns 18, whichever occurs first, the number of passengers is limited to one person under age 20, unless the passenger(s) is a sibling, stepsibling, child or stepchild of the driver. After this period, the number of passengers is limited to one in the front seat and the number of seat belts in the back seat.
 - Cell phone use while driving including a hands-free device, is prohibited for drivers under age 19, except in the case of an emergency.
 - Texting while driving is prohibited.
 - Full Licensing Phase
 - No age-related restrictions apply except in cases where a driver fails to move from the Initial Licensing Phase to the Full Licensing Phase.
 - Cell phone use while driving including a hands-free device, is prohibited for drivers under age 19, except in the case of an emergency.
 - Texting while driving is prohibited.
 - Effective July 1, 2014, a person ages 18-20, who did not take an approved driver education course in high school must successfully complete a six-hour adult driver education course before obtaining a driver's license.
- Illinois hands-free law sanctions are:
 - Standard Violations:
 - First offense: Up to a \$75 fine.
 - Second offense: Up to a \$100 fine.
 - Third offense: Up to a \$125 fine.
 - Fourth+ offense: Up to a \$150 fine.
 - Moving violation: Each offense adds points to your driver record.

- License suspension: Three moving violations within 12 months may lead to suspension.
 - Aggravated Offenses (Causing crashes):
 - Causing serious injury/disfigurement: Class A misdemeanor, minimum \$1,000 fine, mandatory 12-month driver license suspension.
 - Causing death: Class 4 felony (up to three years of jail, \$25,000 fine).
- The State of Illinois employees are required to wear a seat belt when traveling in a state-owned fleet vehicle.
- All grantees that contract with the BSPE must have an approved written seat belt use policy for all employees and staff. Further, the policy must be enforced, and a copy of the policy must be provided with the grant contract.

2B. CHALLENGES

- The Occupant Protection Coordinator position is currently vacant.
- Since 2013's legislative session, there have not been any improvements or updates to the general body of OP laws.
- Local jurisdictions can adopt their own municipal primary seat belt regulation for enforcement within the limits of the town or municipality.
- The Illinois' seat belt law allows for 11 exemptions, as outlined below:
 1. A driver or passenger frequently stopping and leaving the vehicle or delivering property from the vehicle, if the speed of the vehicle between stops does not exceed 15 miles per hour;
 2. A driver or passenger possessing a written statement from a physician that such person is unable for medical or physical reasons, to wear a seat belt;
 3. A driver or passenger possessing an official certificate or license endorsement issued by the appropriate agency in another State or country indicating that the driver is unable for medical, physical, or other valid reasons to wear a seat belt;
 4. A driver operating a vehicle in reverse;
 5. A motor vehicle with a model year prior to 1965;
 6. A motorcycle or motor driven cycle;
 7. A moped;
 8. A motor vehicle which is not required to be equipped with seat belts under federal law;
 9. A motor vehicle operated by a rural letter carrier of the United States postal service while performing duties as a rural letter carrier;
 10. A driver or passenger of an authorized emergency vehicle, except the exception does not apply to vehicles of the fire department, vehicles of the Office of the

State Fire Marshall, or ambulances, unless the delivery of life-saving measures prohibits the use of a seat belt; or

11. A back seat passenger of a taxicab. (Transportation Network Companies are not considered a taxicab so this exemption is not applicable.)

- A violation of the seat belt law is a \$25 fine plus court costs. There is no provision for escalating penalties for subsequent violations of the seat belt law.
- Some courts are routinely dismissing seat belt citations including in cases where the body cam video footage of the traffic stop is no longer available.
- The Illinois' seat belt and child restraint laws apply to "motor vehicles." There are multiple styles and types of non-conventional vehicles on Illinois roads and streets, particularly when a local jurisdiction has enacted an ordinance allowing golf carts, ATVs, or UTVs on their local street network. The non-conventional vehicles are not a "motor" vehicle so the provisions of the seat belt and child restraint laws are not applicable.
- The child restraint law does not require children under the age of 13 to sit in the rear seat of the vehicle.
- The child restraint law includes a medical exemption from use of a child restraint system.
- There is no provision to allow the use of child restraint system law violation fines to support education, instruction, training, or low-income programs to encourage the public to obtain and correctly use a child restraint system.
 - An example of earmarked funding is the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act and the Industrial Hemp Act, which have earmarked the fines and penalties for a violation. The distribution of the earmarked funds is:
 - \$10 of the fine to the circuit clerk;
 - \$10 of the fine to the law enforcement agency that issued the citation;
 - \$15 to the county to fund drug addiction services;
 - \$10 to the Office of the State's Attorney Appellate Prosecutor for use in training programs;
 - \$10 to the State's Attorney; and
 - Any remainder of the fine to the law enforcement agency that issued the citation for the violation.
- CPSTs are not explicitly listed in the Good Samaritan Act (745 ILCS 49).

2C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Fill the Occupant Protection Coordinator position.**
- Increase the fine for a violation of the seat belt law to be commensurate with other traffic offenses such as speeding, failing to stop at a stop sign, and running a red light.

- **Enhance the Illinois child restraint law by requiring children under the age of 13 to be seated in the rear seat of the vehicle when rear seating positions are available.**
- Enhance the Illinois child restraint law by removing the medical exemption from use of a child restraint system.
- Allow for the use of child restraint law violation fines and fees to be used for education, instruction, training, and low- or no-income programs that encourage the public to obtain and correctly use a child restraint system.
- **Provide education to judges handling traffic violations about the positive impacts from the use of seat belts and child restraints for the safety of the vehicle occupants.**
- Amend the Good Samaritan Act to include nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians while performing a child restraint system training, seat check, or assisting with the installation of a child restraint system.

3. LAW ENFORCEMENT

GUIDELINE:

Each State should conduct frequent, high-visibility law enforcement efforts, coupled with communication strategies, to increase seat belt and child safety seat use. Essential components of a law enforcement program should include:

- *Written, enforced seat belt use policies for law enforcement agencies with sanctions for noncompliance to protect law enforcement officers from harm and for officers to serve as role models for the motoring public;*
- *Vigorous enforcement of seat belt and child safety seat laws, including citations and warnings;*
- *Accurate reporting of occupant protection system information on police accident report forms, including seat belt and child safety seat use or nonuse, restraint type, and airbag presence and deployment;*
- *Communication campaigns to inform the public about occupant protection laws and related enforcement activities;*
- *Routine monitoring of citation rates for nonuse of seat belts and child safety seats;*
- *Use of National Child Passenger Safety Certification (basic and in-service) for law enforcement officers;*
- *Utilization of Law Enforcement Liaisons (LELs), for activities such as promotion of national and local mobilizations and increasing law enforcement participation in such mobilizations and collaboration with local chapters of police groups and associations that represent at-risk populations to gain support for enforcement efforts.*

3A. STRENGTHS

- Illinois has a primary seat belt law which requires all occupants, regardless of where they are seated in the vehicle, to wear seat belts. In addition, Illinois has a primary child passenger safety law, often referred to as the *Child Passenger Protection Act* that mandates children under eight years of age be secured in an appropriate child safety seat.
- Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) has the *Child Passenger Protection Act* and the *Seat Safety Belts* law, and the *Child Passenger Safety Instructional Course* which establishes a driver's responsibility to secure a child in a properly adjusted and fastened seat safety belt or an appropriate child restraint system. The requirements that enhance child passenger safety are:
 - Drivers transporting a child under two years of age must properly secure the child in a rear-facing child restraint system unless the child weighs 40 or more pounds or is 40 or more inches tall.
 - Drivers transporting a child less than eight years of age shall be responsible for providing for the protection of such child by properly securing them in an appropriate child restraint system.

- Drivers transporting a child eight years of age, but less than sixteen, shall secure the child in a properly adjusted and fastened seat safety belt.
 - Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs) can provide a child passenger safety instructional course and, if necessary, a car seat or booster seat. First-time violators will not be convicted upon submitting a completed *Child Restraint Citation Compliance Inspection Form*.
 - Under the *Replacement of a Car Seat System*, a policy of automobile insurance must include coverage for the replacement of a child restraint system that was in use by a child during a crash to which coverage is applicable.
- Illinois also just recently passed legislation requiring seat belts on school buses manufactured after July 1, 2031.
 - The safety belt use rate in Illinois is currently 93 percent. In 2019, it was at its highest with a use rate of 94.6 percent, then experienced a slight downward trend from 2020 to 2021 but has increased slightly since 2022.
 - All enforcement grantees are required to have written policies requiring all employees to use seat belts while operating agency vehicles. This policy must be attached to their grant application.
 - Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) offered 198 law enforcement agencies to participate in the Special Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) grants in Federal Fiscal Year 2024-2025.
 - All law enforcement grantees are provided with crash maps and data specific to their jurisdictional areas by the BSPE so their targeted enforcement is data-driven. After the grant period, the enforcement data are evaluated by the agency coordinator and then the Safety Grant Administrators (GA) from BSPE to ensure the guidelines were followed and the benchmarks were met.
 - Illinois has six Law Enforcement Liaisons (LELs) who actively engage with law enforcement grantees throughout the grant process. Each LEL participates in all engagement activities, including an orientation program, three regular in-person meetings, and at least one scheduled phone call with each grantee, ensuring consistent and comprehensive support.
 - Approximately 96 percent of law enforcement agencies utilize the electronic crash reporting system. The statewide crash report does include fields for seat belt/child safety seat use/nonuse, restraint type and airbag presence and deployment.
 - The Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police (ILACP) conducts the Illinois Traffic Safety Challenge where agencies may compete against other similar-sized agencies in a variety of initiatives. This Challenge encourages agencies to adopt a comprehensive strategy to enhance safety through various traffic safety initiatives (of which Occupant Protection (OP)

is a focus), policies, education, and enforcement activities. Winning agencies are recognized at an annual awards breakfast at the Midwest Police and Security Expo.

- BSPE has a *Saved by the Belt* program which allows officers and others to nominate vehicle occupants who survived a serious crash because they were properly wearing seat belts. Similarly, the *Saved by a Car Seat* award recognizes children who were protected in a crash due to correct use of a child restraint system. If the nominee meets the eligibility requirements, the award is presented to the police agency in the recipient's community, who is then responsible for ensuring the honoree receives appropriate recognition.
- The BSPE offers a biennial child passenger safety conference where officers and others who are CPSTs/Is may earn their continuing education credits to fulfill their CPST/I recertification requirements.
- While not entirely specific to law enforcement, the Child Passenger Safety Resource Centers (CPSRC's) Traffic Safety Liaisons (TSLs), who are funded by the ILACP through a non-enforcement grant, offer many *National Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification Trainings*, including the *National Child Passenger Safety Technician HYBRID Certification Training* option, which may be more conducive for law enforcement participation.
- Illinois law enforcement agencies have adopted creative strategies to enforce occupant protection laws. One method is the "Trooper in a Truck" initiative, where a trooper observes traffic from inside a commercial vehicle to spot violations. In addition to this approach, local officers sometimes dress as construction workers and stand at intersections, enabling them to discreetly observe unbelted drivers and passengers, as well as instances of non-use of child restraint systems (CRS). These undetected officers then radio ahead to another officer, who stops the vehicle and takes enforcement action.
- ISP has a Safety Education Unit where Troopers, who are specifically trained, conduct outreach and education programs to the community. These Safety Education Officers (SEOs) have access to eight rollover simulators and seven seat belt convincers to demonstrate the importance of being properly restrained.

3B. CHALLENGES

- There is a lack of law enforcement agencies with strong leadership support for occupant protection. This significantly impacts enforcement efforts, by not prioritizing specific campaigns to promote seat belt use, not offering regular officer training on CPS laws, and without clear enforcement goals.
- Not all law enforcement agencies in the State have written seat belt use policies for their officers.

- Among agencies with written seat belt use policies, the majority do not include any sanctions for noncompliance.
- Illinois does not have a citation central repository. Once an officer issues a citation, it is submitted to the courts for adjudication. Because citation data are not available to the officer or their agency, officers cannot ascertain whether an individual was cited by another officer for the same violation, which can lead to difficulties in tracking repeat offenders and ensuring consistency in enforcement actions across different agencies.
- Occupant protection education and the necessity for enforcing the law as a means of educating the public is not consistently provided to Illinois law enforcement during their basic police academy training. There is no additional training provided on OP to existing officers unless it involves a statute change.
- Enforcement of the Illinois occupant protection statutes is not a high priority among most law enforcement agencies. Approximately 198 out of the roughly 1,114 law enforcement agencies in Illinois participate in grant-funded OP enforcement efforts. Many agencies who might be eligible to participate chose not to.
- Enforcement of occupant protection laws only occurs during grant-funded mobilizations. ISP is one of the few agencies that will enforce occupant protection laws year-round. Occupant protection enforcement is not done routinely throughout the year for a variety of reasons e.g, agency staffing shortages, officers not wishing to participate, courts who dismiss occupant protection citations and other enforcement-related citations, etc.
- It appears law enforcement officers in Illinois tend to conduct enforcement initiatives on an individual or department basis, rather than collaborating with other agencies. This limited partnering may be due to differences in departmental priorities, resource constraints, or jurisdictional challenges, which can make coordination difficult. There are some exceptions; for example, the ISP may partner with a local law enforcement agency to saturate an area with enforcement for a short period, and agencies in Illinois that border another State such as Missouri may conduct enforcement simultaneously with their partners across State lines.
- There are no occupant protection advisory task forces in Illinois where law enforcement officers could network with other law enforcement agencies, and other highway safety stakeholders.
- Not all law enforcement agencies have the capability to utilize electronic citations or electronic crash reports. As a result, these agencies must rely on manual processes, which can lead to delays in reporting and data inaccuracies.
- The statewide citation does not allow officers to incorporate multiple offenses on one citation; hence every violation must be prepared on a separate citation.

- The Judicial sector in Illinois may dismiss a citation for any reason and frequently does. Some judges have dismissed citations for occupant protection and some have even dismissed all citations written during a grant-funded enforcement period or in cases where the body cam video footage of the traffic stop is no longer available.
- Officers may not be familiar with best practice guidelines regarding the safe transportation of children, nor be familiar with the various child restraint systems, thus making enforcement as well as recommendations to caregivers challenging.
- The occupant protection education provided to law enforcement officers during their initial police academy training is limited to basic information on the statutes in the vehicle code. If other training such as *Below 100* is offered, it is not standardized among all the police academies.
- Due to ongoing staffing shortages and increased responsibilities for law enforcement officers, the roles of ISP Safety Education Officers (SEOs) have shifted from full-time to part-time positions. This change ensures coverage of essential duties. As a result of SEOs moving to part-time positions to cover these essential duties, there has been a decrease in the number of community outreach programs conducted by Troopers.
- There are flaws in the wording of the *Child Passenger Protection Act* that fall short of current best practice recommendations and may compromise the safety of child passengers.
 - The statute allows children weighing more than 40 lbs. to be transported in the rear seat of a motor vehicle using only a lap belt if a lap and shoulder belt are not available.
 - The Act permits children between the ages of 8 and 15 to be secured with seat belts alone, regardless of whether they have outgrown child restraint systems.
 - There is no provision to ensure children under 13 remain in the rear seat of the vehicle as according to best practice guidelines.
 - The statute includes an exemption for children with medical disabilities if a physician determines that a child restraint is not required.

Taken together, these statutory allowances do not ensure optimal safety for child passengers and fall short of evidence-based standards for occupant protection.

- Law enforcement officers, except for ISP, have the option to issue a local ordinance citation in lieu of a state citation for violations of the occupant protection laws. This practice, while financially beneficial to the driver and the municipality where the fine or costs are paid, it circumvents the intent of the enforcement by diverting fines and fees to municipalities rather than the State. In the case of violations of the *Child Passenger Protection Act*, the educational component is not included. As a result, this may reduce the deterrent effect intended by State law and undermine statewide compliance efforts.

- There are no progressive penalties for drivers who repeatedly violate the seat belt law, whether enforcement is conducted through a state citation or under municipal ordinances. As a result, repeat offenders do not face increased deterrents, which may diminish the overall effectiveness of seat belt enforcement and compliance efforts.
- The *IDOT Child Restraint Citation Compliance Inspection Form (BSPE 1000)* is available to any CPST/I to document the education a violator receives for violating the child passenger safety law. The educational component consists of a hands-on child restraint demonstration and a brief instructional session, after which participants receive documentation of compliance. Violators who are cited on a state citation for a child passenger safety violation may participate in this program in lieu of paying the fine and court costs, with the goal of increasing understanding and compliance with child passenger safety requirements. However, many law enforcement officers are not aware of this form and its educational component. In addition, many officers choose to cite violations on a local ordinance thus circumventing the intended process and diminishing the intent of the law to provide education to violators. This lack of access can contribute to ongoing non-compliance and increased risk for children.
- Many law enforcement officers are not aware of the *Saved by the Belt/Car Seat* award, a long-standing recognition program that honors individuals whose lives were saved by seat belts or child restraint systems.
- Law enforcement officers who attend and pass the *National Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification Training* may receive two Mobile Team Unit (MTU) credits towards their 32 mandatory in-service credit hours. Currently the officer must petition their local MTU and may or may not receive credit hours.
- Law enforcement crash reconstructionists who have received any type of CPS training are few. According to a 2022 survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), only 15 percent of crash reconstructionists reported receiving specialized training on child restraint systems. As a result, these officers might not be able to determine whether a child was properly secured in the car seat or whether the car seat was correctly installed in the vehicle prior to the crash.
- As law enforcement in general are being tasked with more responsibilities it is difficult to recruit officers to participate in the CPST certification training. Many former CPSTs do not recertify.
- The Illinois seat belt law allows for 11 exemptions, as outlined below:
 1. A driver or passenger frequently stopping and leaving the vehicle or delivering property from the vehicle, if the speed of the vehicle between stops does not exceed 15 miles per hour;
 2. A driver or passenger possessing a written statement from a physician that such person is unable for medical or physical reasons, to wear a seat belt;

3. A driver or passenger possessing an official certificate or license endorsement issued by the appropriate agency in another State or country indicating that the driver is unable for medical, physical, or other valid reasons to wear a seat belt;
4. A driver operating a vehicle in reverse;
5. A motor vehicle with a model year prior to 1965;
6. A motorcycle or motor driven cycle;
7. A moped;
8. A motor vehicle which is not required to be equipped with seat belts under federal law;
9. A motor vehicle operated by a rural letter carrier of the United States postal service while performing duties as a rural letter carrier;
10. A driver or passenger of an authorized emergency vehicle, except the exception does not apply to vehicles of the fire department, vehicles of the Office of the State Fire Marshall, or ambulances, unless the delivery of life-saving measures prohibits the use of a seat belt; or
11. A back seat passenger of a taxicab. (Transportation Network Companies are not considered a taxicab so this exemption is not applicable.)

- The child restraint law includes a medical exemption from use of a child restraint system.

3C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage law enforcement agency leadership to support and prioritize occupant protection enforcement for the safety of their community.
- Mandate law enforcement agencies who are grantees, have not only written seat belt use policies for their employees, but must include sanctions for noncompliance.
- Mandate that law enforcement grantees use the state citation when enforcing occupant protection laws during all grant-funded enforcement activities, thus ensuring consistency in enforcement and accurate tracking of occupant protection law violations statewide.
- Implement higher fines for subsequent offenses of the seat belt law and adding license points for repeat violations of the law.
- Strengthen deterrence and enhance the *Child Passenger Protection Act*, by introducing escalating fines for each subsequent violation and require mandatory safety education for second and subsequent offenders.
- Enhance the *Child Passenger Protection Act* (625 ILCS 25/1) and the *Seat Safety Belts Law* (625 ILCS 5/12-603.1) by implementing the following components:
 - Require children to ride in an appropriate child restraint until they are over 8 years old and at least 4 feet 9 inches tall or at least 65 pounds and can achieve a proper seat belt fit.

- Require children under 13 to ride in the rear seat when rear-seat positions are available.
- Remove the exemption for taxicabs.
- Remove the medical exemption.
- Develop a statewide citation repository to implement a citation database which could be queried by any law enforcement officer to obtain real-time enforcement data.
- **Incorporate *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement* education into the basic curriculum at all Illinois police academies for new hires.**
- Ensure all Illinois law enforcement Mobile Team Units recognize and allow officers who attend and pass the *National Child Passenger Safety Certification Training* receive credit hours that may be applied to their yearly mandatory in-service requirement.
- Increase the number of law enforcement Child Passenger Safety Technicians in general, particularly officers who perform crash reconstruction duties.
- **Develop a law enforcement card with basic information on correct use of child restraint systems, the intricacies of the law, and best practice guidelines. Cards should be disseminated to every officer in the state.**
- Incorporate knowledge about the *Saved by the Belt* and *Saved by the Car Seat* awards to all law enforcement agencies, including the survivor nomination process. This would enable officers to nominate individuals from crashes they have investigated, bringing attention to the effectiveness of seat belts and child restraint systems. These steps could help ensure the award's visibility and encourage more nominations, ultimately promoting occupant protection.
- **Implement that the Law Enforcement Liaisons visit all law enforcement agencies in Illinois to garner support for the law enforcement community in the furtherance of highway safety initiatives and to possibly recruit agencies to become grantees.**
- Develop and implement a process to incorporate an Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force to assist the Occupant Protection Coordinator in determining funding for potential occupant protection grantees and to assist in coordination of programs across the State. Include representatives from traditional and non-traditional organizations including local health departments and hospitals, schools, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, medical professionals, childcare, employers, faith based, insurance, media and at-risk.

- **Provide education to judges handling traffic violations about the positive impacts from the use of seat belts and child restraints for the safety of the vehicle occupants.**

4. COMMUNICATION

GUIDELINE:

As part of each State's communication program, the State should enlist the support of a variety of media, including mass media, to improve public awareness and knowledge and to support enforcement efforts about seat belts, air bags, and child safety seats. Communication programs and materials should be designed to reach at-risk populations, as appropriate. To sustain or increase rates of seat belt and child safety seat use, a well-organized, effectively managed communication program should:

- *Identify at-risk audiences (e.g., low-belt use, high-risk motorists) and develop messages appropriate for these audiences;*
- *Address the enforcement of the State's seat belt and child passenger safety laws; the safety benefits of regular, correct seat belt (both manual and automatic) and child safety seat use; and the additional protection provided by air bags;*
- *Capitalize on special events, such as nationally recognized safety and injury prevention weeks and local enforcement campaigns;*
- *Provide materials and media campaigns in more than one language as necessary;*
- *Use national themes and materials;*
- *Participate in national programs to increase seat belt and child safety seat use and use law enforcement as the State's contribution to obtaining national public awareness through concentrated, simultaneous activity;*
- *Utilize paid media, as appropriate;*
- *Publicize seat belt use surveys and other relevant statistics;*
- *Encourage news media to report seat belt use and nonuse in motor vehicle crashes;*
- *Involve media representatives in planning and disseminating communication campaigns;*
- *Encourage private sector groups to incorporate seat belt use messages into their media campaigns;*
- *Utilize and involve all media outlets: television, radio, print, signs, billboards, theaters, sports events, health fairs; and*
- *Evaluate all communication campaign efforts.*

4A. STRENGTHS

- The Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) conduct attitude and awareness surveys which focus on seat belt related opinions and behaviors along with awareness of traffic safety related slogans and messages during campaigns.
- BSPE capitalizes on special events, especially the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) safety and prevention weeks, and law enforcement events to promote traffic safety.

- BSPE uses an experienced media contractor to develop creative and place paid and earned traffic safety messaging on media platforms. The contractor uses a combination of television, radio, print, signs, billboards, community sporting events, and social media platforms.
- BSPE and its marketing contractor have developed a successful campaign titled “*It’s not a game,*” which raises awareness about seat belt safety. The campaign features an interactive website that provides educational resources and more recently featuring creative content with professional football player Cole Kmet.



- BSPE produces various resource and marketing materials and child passenger safety information in Spanish including providing access to translation on the *It’s not a game* website. Child Passenger Safety Resource Centers (CPSRC) also have resources in other languages or have the capability to translate for community members as needed by utilizing Google Translate or a special video chat where they can access a translator.
- The 2022-2026 Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) lists Critical Emphasis Areas. Emphasis Area 1, Safe Behavior, includes a focus on reducing unrestrained fatalities and serious injuries through two Strategies:
 - Strengthen occupant protection laws and enforcement
 - Communication campaigns

4B. CHALLENGES

- BSPE provides a website for the public and advocates to locate and acquire traffic safety information however, the site is challenging to maneuver and uncover needed information.
- Although BSPE posts the seat belt survey report on their website, the information is not analyzed or broken down for use by traffic safety partners. As a result, it is not easily shared on websites, social media, or with local communities.
- The media contractor, BSPE, Traffic Safety Liaisons, and IDOT communication teams each play distinct roles in promoting traffic safety, yet they lack a coordinated forum to share insights and evaluate statewide media efforts.

- Crash data received on unrestrained occupants is not analyzed and tracked, resulting in missed opportunities to direct marketing campaigns to areas most at risk and potentially reducing the effectiveness of safety interventions.
- Illinois seat belt use rate has reached 90+ percent, and it will be challenging to reach the last group of non-belt users.

4C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct an in-depth analysis of the crash data to identify potential associations, and specific mitigation strategies, relating to unrestrained occupants killed in crashes and other risky driving behaviors. This analysis should identify demographic and location information for potential engineering treatments, along with innovative enforcement and education interventions addressing complex multi-hazards and can be used to develop messaging to the public.
- **Utilize the findings in both the observational seat belt use and other surveys, coupled with the crash data, to more acutely focus specific occupant protection projects and media to problem areas defined in the surveys as they relate to demographics, gender, vehicle type, and areas with lower use rates. Share this information through your grantee network and community partners for use with their local media, marketing, and social media platforms.**
- **Augment the monthly communications meeting to include not only Illinois Department of Transportation but by including outside partners to contribute to discussion on content and distribution of messages.**
- Create a communication committee possibly under an Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force to:
 - Review traffic safety website resources by Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering and grantees.
 - Review social media sites being used by stakeholders, safety partners, and other grantees.
 - Review occupant protection materials being distributed around the State and determine if they are easily readable and follow current marketing design formats.
 - Determine how best to focus the driving public on one main resource, where easy access to all traffic safety resources statewide can be found. This could be the current Illinois Department of Transportation website or a new website or webpage where the public can have a “one stop shop” for all things traffic safety.
- **Create a database of traffic safety advocates, including Child Passenger Safety Technicians, to enable the Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering, to easily share updates on activities, policy changes,**

upcoming campaigns, and event support requests. Consider distributing a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter with data and messaging, law enforcement statistics, and child passenger safety information that advocates can share on their social media platforms.

- Review State and Federal funding to increase paid media for child passenger safety, adult seat belt use and high-risk populations including youth and pickup drivers. Deliver messaging during State mobilizations but continue to place and distribute throughout the year on media platforms to reach the last challenging eight percent.

5. OCCUPANT PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN

GUIDELINE:

Each State should enact occupant protection laws that require the correct restraint of all children, in all seating positions and in every vehicle. Regulations and policies should exist that provide clear guidance to the motoring public concerning occupant protection for children. Each State should require that children birth to 16 years old (or the State's driving age) be properly restrained in the appropriate child restraint system or seat belt. Gaps in State child passenger safety and seat belt laws should be closed to ensure that all children are covered in all seating positions, with requirements for age-appropriate child restraint use. Key provisions of the law should include: driver responsibility for ensuring that children are properly restrained; proper restraint of children under 13 years of age in the rear seat (unless all available rear seats are occupied by younger children); a requirement that passengers be in designated seating positions; a ban on passengers in the cargo areas of light trucks; and a limit on the number of passengers based on the number of available seat belts in the vehicle. To achieve these objectives, State occupant protection programs for children should:

- *Collect and analyze key data elements in order to evaluate the program progress;*
- *Assure that adequate and accurate training is provided to the professionals who deliver and enforce the occupant protection programs for parents and caregivers;*
- *Assure that the capability exists to train and retain nationally certified child passenger safety technicians to address attrition of trainers or changes in the population;*
- *Promote the use of child restraints and assure that a plan has been developed to provide an adequate number of inspection stations and clinics, which meet minimum quality criteria;*
- *Continue programs and activities to increase the use of booster seats by children who outgrow infant or convertible child safety seats but are still too small to safely use seat belts;*
- *Maintain a strong law enforcement program that includes vigorous enforcement of the child occupant protection laws;*
- *Enlist the support of the media to increase public awareness about child occupant protection laws and the use of child restraints. Strong efforts should be made to reach at-risk populations;*
- *Assure that the child occupant protection programs at the local level are periodically assessed and that programs are designed to meet the unique needs of the community;*
- *Establish the infrastructure to systematically coordinate the array of child occupant protection program components;*
- *Encourage law enforcement participation in the National Child Passenger Safety Certification (basic and in-service) training for law enforcement officers; and*
- *Consider carefully crafted and administered child safety seat subsidy and/or give-away programs.*

5A. STRENGTHS

- Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) has the *Child Passenger Protection Act* and the *Seat Safety Belts* law, and the *Child Passenger Safety Instructional Course* which establishes a driver's responsibility to secure a child in a properly adjusted and fastened seat safety belt or an appropriate child restraint system. The requirements that enhance child passenger safety are:
 - Drivers transporting a child under two years of age must properly secure the child in a rear-facing child restraint system unless the child weighs 40 or more pounds or is 40 or more inches tall.
 - Drivers transporting a child less than eight years of age shall be responsible for providing for the protection of such child by properly securing them in an appropriate child restraint system.
 - Drivers transporting a child eight years of age, but less than sixteen, shall secure the child in a properly adjusted and fastened seat safety belt.
 - Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs) can provide a child passenger safety instructional course and, if necessary, a car seat or booster seat. First-time violators will not be convicted upon submitting a completed *Child Restraint Citation Compliance Inspection Form*.
 - Under the *Replacement of a Car Seat System*, a policy of automobile insurance must include coverage for the replacement of a child restraint system that was in use by a child during a crash to which coverage is applicable.

- BSPE's Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026 local Agency Non-Enforcement Program regarding the Child Passenger Safety Resource Center (CPSRC) program establishes a clear, comprehensive framework for addressing statewide child occupant passenger safety priorities. The grant language aligns with best practices and focuses on the *Strategic Highway Safety Plan* priority areas.

- Five CPSRC region programs are funded, and the grantees overseeing them are Traffic Safety Liaisons (TSLs). The Special Needs Resource Center is also funded and is overseen by the State Special Needs Resource Center Liaison.

- The TSLs and the State Special Needs Resource Center Liaison are all experienced CPST/Is. Their strong historical performance consistently delivers measurable outcomes that advance BSPE child passenger safety initiatives and routinely exceeds grant goals. They demonstrate exceptional dedication, develop innovative approaches, maintain extensive networks, and collaborate with many agencies. Their contributions continue to elevate and strengthen child passenger safety efforts statewide.

- BSPE's CPSRCs provide both in-person and hybrid offerings of the *National Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification Training* and the *Child Passenger Safety Technician Renewal Testing Course* statewide. This certification meets the training requirements of the *Child Passenger Protection Act*, which mandates that only certified CPSTs may conduct a child passenger safety instruction course. BSPE, with other

partners, provides numerous training opportunities to certify CPSTs through its robust training calendar, averaging 44 courses per year over the last three years and twenty renewal courses each year over the last three years.

- Illinois currently has 1,733 certified CPSTs, with at least one serving in 88 of Illinois' 102 counties. This includes:
 - 64 CPS Instructors
 - 38 Lead Instructors
 - 25 Hybrid-Endorsed Instructors
 - 43 Technician Proxies
 - 118 who offer virtual car seat education
 - 72 who self-identify as Spanish-speaking
 - 16 have completed the *Safety on School Buses National Training*
 - 153 have completed *Safe Travel for All Children: Transporting Children with Special Healthcare Needs (STAC)*
 - 5 STAC Instructors

- The BSPE CPST network represents a broad cross-section of professional sectors, strengthening Illinois' ability to deliver and enforce child occupant protection programs. The statewide CPSTs are from child care (9), car seat manufacturers (4), highway safety (15), hospital and medical settings (224), law enforcement (554), non-profit organizations (199), other (95), other retail (6), public health (118), rescue/emergency medical services (354), Safe Kids (4), schools and universities (56), vehicle retail (1), and those who are self-employed (19). This broad representation ensures that child occupant protection expertise is embedded across the many environments where caregivers receive services, thereby supporting strong cross-sector collaboration.

- BSPE benefits from a strong network of Spanish-speaking CPSTs who expand Illinois ability to serve all of the state's communities. These technicians not only support families by providing linguistically accessible education at car seat checks and community events but also contribute their expertise by translating materials and resources. Their involvement strengthens BSPE's capacity to deliver responsive child occupant protection services and ensures that Spanish-speaking caregivers receive accurate, understandable safety information.

- CPSTs recertify every two years. BSPE supports recertification by providing funding for certification and recertification fees. The recertification rates for the last three years and the national comparison are:
 - FFY2023 52.65 percent, national 55.73 percent
 - FFY2024 46.81 percent, national 49.92 percent
 - FFY2025 50.00 percent, national 55.06 percent

- BSPE demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting the use of child restraints and makes car seats and booster seats available to caregivers who demonstrate financial need. TSLs share a distribution criterion and provide car seats and booster seats to inspection stations and clinics that meet minimum quality standards, which include at least one CPST. Distribution of car seats and booster seats for the past three years:
 - FFY 2023 2,116
 - FFY 2024 2,395
 - FFY 2025 2,370

- BSPE requires the use of the National Digital Car Seat Check Form (NDCF) for all car seat checks conducted under grant agreements. This requirement ensures consistent statewide data collection, enabling meaningful tracking and analysis of data trends in child restraint use and key data elements to evaluate program progress, to inform program decisions, address misuse or non-use of child restraints, and guide the development of communication and media materials.

- BSPE supports statewide inspection stations, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s Inspection Station Locator lists 185 inspection stations.

- BSPE and the TSLs support a statewide CPS Conference every other (odd) year, attended by more than 300 CPSTs. This conference aims to reduce attrition and ensure technicians remain certified. Attendees can earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs). BSPE also provides funding for conference attendance, including the LifeSavers Conference on Roadway Safety and the Kidz in Motion Child Passenger Safety Conference. TSLs are required to provide CEUs in their region. The TSLs collaborate to provide frequent Technician Skill Builder CEU offerings in their regions.

- TSLs maintain strong working relationships with law enforcement statewide. They support CPSTs in law enforcement through training and resources, inspection stations and events, and paid recertification fees. Law enforcement agencies across the State demonstrate a commitment to CPS, as about 33 percent of Illinois’ certified CPSTs are affiliated with law enforcement.

- BSPE employs a comprehensive communication strategy to advance occupant safety, leveraging both BSPE-developed materials and professionally produced paid media created by BSPE’s paid media vendor. BSPE further expands its reach by providing Public Information and Education (PIE) materials in English and Spanish and by supporting Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Week by providing dedicated paid media and offering a fillable flyer that partners can customize for local use, ensuring consistent and accessible messaging statewide

- Illinois has the *Child Passenger Protection Act*, the *Seat Safety Belts* law, and the *Child Passenger Safety Instructional Course* which establishes a driver's responsibility to

secure a child in a properly adjusted and fastened seat safety belt or an appropriate child restraint system.

- BSPE provides these child passenger safety handouts: *If You're Pregnant: Seat Belt Recommendations for Drivers and Passengers*, *Our Law Just Grew: Rear-Face Until 2*, and the *Child Passenger Safety Guide and Car Seat Recommendations: Choosing the Right Seat*. In addition, they provide the Children Have an Identity (CHAD) sticker to place on car seats, when allowed by car seat manufacturers, for first responders to identify a child, and a handout with the CHAD sticker background story.

5B. CHALLENGES

- The BSPE Occupant Protection Coordinator position remains vacant. The absence of a designated coordinator limits BSPE's ability to provide consistent leadership, training, data review and analysis, and technical assistance to child occupant protection programs and Local Agency Non-Enforcement grantee programs, particularly the CPSRCs and the Special Needs Resource Center.
- Child occupant protection strategies are indirectly included in the *Illinois 2022-2026 Strategic Highway Safety Plan* as part of the Safe System Approach.
- Illinois lacks a Statewide Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force that meets regularly to ensure consistent coordination, shared priorities, and unified statewide outreach across all occupant protection programs.
- Illinois lacks a Child Passenger Safety Coalition to unify partners and foster collaboration, improve resource sharing, and support consistent, data-driven strategies to enhance child passenger safety.
- The recertification rate for CPSTs has been below the national average for the past three years.
- CPSTs are unaware of the free national resources and training available to support them.
- BSPE does not issue an electronic newsletter to community partners or CPSTs, limiting the dissemination of statewide updates and training opportunities.
- BSPE lacks a coordinated strategic communications plan for child passenger safety. The absence of a webpage with a CPS data dashboard, statewide event calendar, standardized outreach materials, social media campaign collateral, and regular promotion of CPSRC events reduces public awareness and participation, as well as CPST certification and recertification.
- BSPE does not consistently collect or analyze NDCF data to evaluate child occupant protection programs. BSPE supported CPSTs often use the NDCF paper form for car seat

checks instead of the online version, and these forms are never entered into the online database, resulting in incomplete and understated reporting. Consequently, BSPE lacks reliable data to report on activities, identify misuse trends, assess training needs, or understand geographic disparities, limiting its ability to evaluate and improve child occupant protection program performance.

- There is no statewide observational study of child occupant restraint use.
- There is no attitudinal survey on perceptions of the car seat law or correct child restraint use.
- Illinois' *Child Passenger Protection Act* and the *Seat Safety Belts* laws contain components that diminish the law's ability to best protect children on the State's roadways, as follows:
 - No provision requires combining a child's height, weight, and proper seat belt fit—along with age—to ensure the best occupant protection.
 - The law does not require children ages eight to 13 to sit in the rear seat when rear seating positions are available.
 - The laws do not apply to the back seat passenger of a taxicab. Transportation Network Companies are not considered a taxicab, so this exemption is not applicable.
- Officers are not required to take training to enforce child occupant protection laws effectively.
- CPS outreach and educational materials are available only as print-order items and are limited to English and Spanish, restricting immediate access and limiting outreach to communities with additional language needs. Media products do not uniformly incorporate ADA accessibility elements such as high-contrast design, readable font sizes, captioned video, or plain-language best practices.
- There is no statewide coordinated communication outreach plan to promote the child occupant protection law, with an emphasis on booster seat and car seat recommendation for all children, to increase booster seat use among children who have outgrown rear-facing child restraints but may transition too quickly to a seat belt before achieving proper seat belt fit.

5C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritize the immediate recruitment and hiring of a qualified Illinois Department of Transportation Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering Occupant Protection Coordinator.

- Include specific child occupant protection strategies in the *Illinois 2027-2031 Strategic Highway Safety Plan* to ensure they are prioritized.
- Establish a Statewide Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force that meets regularly to establish the infrastructure to systematically coordinate the array of child occupant protection program components.
- Establish a statewide Child Passenger Safety Coalition, led by the Occupant Protection Coordinator, that meets regularly to ensure the child occupant protection program at the local level is periodically assessed and that programs are designed to meet the unique needs of the Child Passenger Safety Resource Centers.
- **Implement a robust statewide mentorship and outreach approach to retain and recertify Child Passenger Safety Technicians, to ensure the capability to deliver child occupant protection safety programming statewide remains.**
- Issue a newsletter, at regular intervals, to statewide partners and Child Passenger Safety Technicians to disseminate information, updates, and training opportunities.
- Establish a coordinated strategic communications plan for child passenger safety that includes a webpage hosting a Child Passenger Safety data dashboard, a statewide events calendar, standardized outreach materials, social media campaigns, and regular promotion of Child Passenger Safety Resource Center events to increase public awareness and participation.
- **Require all Illinois Department of Transportation supported Child Passenger Safety technicians and Local Agency Non-Enforcement Program grantees to use the National Digital Car Seat Check Form or the paper version of the National Digital Car Seat Check Form, with a requirement to enter all National Digital Car Seat Check Form forms to the website by the end of the federal fiscal year as a condition of grant funding.**
- Assess and analyze these National Digital Car Seat Check Form data to evaluate programs, progress, and use the results to guide training needs, resource allocation, and identification of high-risk areas. Data should be shared with the Illinois Department of Transportation Bureau of Data Collection.
- Conduct an annual statewide observational child occupant restraint use survey.
- Conduct an annual attitudinal survey, including questions regarding respondents' knowledge of the law or proper use of car seats and booster seats.
- Enhance the *Child Passenger Protection Act* (625 ILCS 25/1) and the *Seat Safety Belts Law* (625 ILCS 5/12-603.1) by implementing the following components:

- Require children to ride in an appropriate child restraint until they are over 8 years old and at least 4 feet 9 inches tall or at least 65 pounds and can achieve a proper seat belt fit.
 - Require children under 13 to ride in the rear seat when rear-seat positions are available.
 - Remove the exemption for taxicabs.
 - Remove the medical exemption.
- **Require all law enforcement and Law Enforcement Liaisons to complete *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement*, a one-hour free course available online or in-person, presented by a Child Passenger Safety Technician.**
- Continue efforts to secure approval for *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement* and the *Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification Training* as required approved in-service training.
- Deliver the *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement* in person at all academy classes and law enforcement conferences by a law enforcement Child Passenger Safety Technician.
- Encourage all law enforcement officers who take the *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement* course to use the free app as a road-side reference.
- **Create Child Passenger Safety and other Public Information and Education materials available for download and for print-on-demand in multiple languages. All media should incorporate Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility elements such as high-contrast design, readable font sizes, captioned video, and plain-language best practices.**

6. OUTREACH PROGRAM

GUIDELINE:

Each state should encourage extensive statewide and community involvement in occupant protection education by involving individuals and organizations outside the traditional highway safety community. Representation from health, business, and education sectors, and from communities throughout the State, should be encouraged. Community involvement broadens public support for the state's programs and can increase a State's ability to deliver highway safety education programs. To encourage statewide and community involvement, States should:

- *Establish a coalition or task force of individuals and organizations to actively promote use of occupant protection systems;*
- *Create an effective communications network among coalition members to keep members informed about issues;*
- *Provide relevant materials and resources necessary to conduct occupant protection education programs, especially directed toward young people, in local settings;*
- *Provide materials and resources necessary to conduct occupant protection education programs, especially for programs directed toward at-risk populations as indicated by the data.*

States should undertake a variety of outreach programs to achieve statewide and community involvement in occupant protection education, as described below. Programs should include outreach to at-risk populations, health and medical communities, schools and employers.

At-Risk Populations

Each State should work closely with individuals and organizations that represent at-risk populations identified by traffic safety data. Community leaders and representatives from community groups and organizations will help States to increase the use of child safety seats and seat belts. The State should:

- *Evaluate the need for, and provide, if necessary, materials and resources in multiple languages;*
- *Collect and analyze data on fatalities and injuries to identify at-risk populations;*
- *Ensure representation of at-risk populations on State occupant protection coalitions and other work groups;*
- *Provide guidance to grantees on conducting outreach programs designed to reach at-risk populations;*
- *Utilize leaders from at-risk populations as spokespeople to promote seat belt use and child safety seat;*
- *Conduct outreach efforts to at-risk populations during law enforcement mobilization periods.*

Health and Medical Communities

Each State should integrate occupant protection into health programs. The failure of drivers and passengers to use occupant protection systems is a major public health problem that must be recognized by the medical and health care communities. The SHSO, the State Health Department and other State or local medical organizations should collaborate in developing programs that:

- *Integrate occupant protection into professional health training curricula and comprehensive public health planning;*
- *Promote occupant protection systems as a health promotion/injury prevention measure;*
- *Require public health and medical personnel to use available motor vehicle occupant protection systems during work hours;*
- *Provide technical assistance and education about the importance of motor vehicle occupant protection to primary caregivers (e.g., doctors, nurses, clinic staff);*
- *Include questions about seat belt use in health risk appraisals;*
- *Utilize health care providers as visible public spokespeople for seat belt and child safety seat use;*
- *Provide information about the availability of child safety seats at, and integrate child safety seat inspections into, maternity hospitals and other prenatal and natal care centers;*
- *Collect, analyze and publicize data on additional injuries and medical expenses resulting from nonuse of occupant protection devices.*

Schools

Each State should encourage local school boards and educators to incorporate occupant protection education into school curricula. The SHSO in cooperation with the State Department of Education should:

- *Ensure that highway safety and traffic-related injury control, in general, and occupant protection, in particular, are included in the State-approved K-12 health and safety education curricula and textbooks;*
- *Establish and enforce written policies requiring that school employees use seat belts when operating a motor vehicle on the job;*
- *Encourage active promotion of regular seat belt use through classroom and extracurricular activities as well as in school-based health clinics;*
- *Work with school resource officers to promote seat belt use among high school students; and*
- *Establish and enforce written school policies that require students driving to and from school to wear seat belts. Violation of these policies should result in revocation of parking or other campus privileges for a stated period of time.*

Employers

Each State and local subdivision should encourage all employers to require seat belt use on the job as a condition of employment. Private sector employers should follow the lead of Federal and State government employers and comply with Executive Order 13043, “Increasing Seat Belt Use in the United States” as well as all applicable Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration regulations or Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidance regarding use of seat belt by private business employees on the job. All employers should:

- *Establish and enforce a seat belt use policy with sanctions for nonuse; and*
- *Conduct occupant protection education programs for employees on their seat belt use policies and the safety benefits of motor vehicle occupant protection devices.*

6A. STRENGTHS

- The Illinois Department of Transportation, Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) funds five local agencies to serve as Child Passenger Safety Resource Centers (CPSRC). The centers are designed to conduct public information and education campaigns focusing on child passenger safety issues. They serve as regional resources providing education, training, and support in promoting safety programs.
- CPSRCs are staffed by Traffic Safety Liaisons (TSLs). Each CPSRC covers a specific region in the state. They coordinate and support traffic safety initiatives within that region. The five regions are Region 1- Chicago, Region 2- Cook and Collar Counties, Region 3- Northwest, Region 4- Central, and Region 5- Southern.
- The five Traffic Safety Liaisons possess extensive expertise in traffic safety and demonstrate a strong commitment to serving their communities.
- There are four Think First Chapters within the State of Illinois. These chapters develop and distribute effective injury prevention educational programs and resources to communities and schools.
- As of October 2025, the State of Illinois has 1,733 Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs) across the State who serve as an advocate and resource to provide community presentations and child safety seat checks.
- BSPE provides an opportunity for CPSTs and Child Passenger Safety Instructors to attend a biennial conference to receive educational updates and to network.
- CPSRCs are sponsored by and work with the medical communities within the state providing technical assistance and education about the importance of motor vehicle occupant protection to primary caregivers (e.g., doctors, nurses), hospitals, and health

departments.

- The Illinois State Police has safety education officers who visit communities and schools with eight rollover simulator machines and seven seat belt convincers to assist with traffic safety education.

6B. CHALLENGES

- Illinois is a state with large metropolitan areas and many low populated rural areas.
- Although the BSPE has many successful outreach programs, activities, and partners, there is little coordination, collaboration or sharing of successful programs.
- At times the Child Passenger Safety Programs overshadow other outreach efforts.
- Traffic safety advocates (e.g. law enforcement, child passenger safety, judicial, engineering, medical) do not have an opportunity to come together and share ideas, network, and learn.

6C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Challenge the State's partners to develop a structure for the development of a statewide Occupant Protection Advisory Task Force with a mission of increasing the seat belt use rate and the correct and consistent use of child passenger restraints.**
 - **Include representatives from traditional and non-traditional organizations including local health departments and hospitals, schools, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, medical professionals, childcare, employers, faith based, insurance, AAA, media, and at-risk population.**
 - **Develop a comprehensive seat belt use strategic plan and calendar to comprise enforcement, media, and outreach including child passenger safety.**
 - **Identify times of the year to coordinate high visibility enforcement and corresponding media and outreach in communities to better harmonize efforts to achieve a higher seat belt use rate.**
 - **Concentrate on programming, outreach, enforcement, and messaging in areas of the State with the lowest seat belt use rate.**
 - **Evaluate existing programs including operations within the Child Passenger Safety Resource Centers and determine how to share and implement within all regions in the State.**
- Establish an Illinois Department of Transportation Conference where an agenda of programming can encompass key traffic safety topic areas including data updates, media training, grant information and sharing of successful programming. Include conference learning activities for law enforcement (*Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement*, *Traffic Occupant Protection Strategies (TOPS)* training), child passenger safety, teens, youth, and engineering.

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7. DATA AND EVALUATION

GUIDELINE:

Each State should access and analyze reliable data sources for problem identification and program planning. Each State should conduct several different types of evaluation to effectively measure progress and to plan and implement new program strategies. Program management should:

- *Conduct and publicize at least one statewide observational survey of seat belt and child safety seat use annually, ensuring that it meets current, applicable Federal guidelines;*
- *Maintain trend data on child safety seat use, seat belt use and air bag deployment in fatal crashes;*
- *Identify at-risk populations through observational usage surveys and crash data;*
- *Conduct and publicize statewide surveys of public knowledge and attitudes about occupant protection laws and systems;*
- *Obtain monthly or quarterly data from law enforcement agencies on the number of seat belt and child passenger safety citations and convictions;*
- *Evaluate the use of program resources and the effectiveness of existing general communication as well as special/high-risk population education programs;*
- *Obtain data on morbidity, as well as the estimated cost of crashes, and determine the relation of injury to seat belt use and nonuse; and*
- *Ensure that evaluation results are an integral part of new program planning and problem identification.*

7A. STRENGTHS

- The Bureau of Safety Programs and Engineering (BSPE) which is located within the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) utilizes police-reported motor vehicle crash data, attitudinal surveys, and observation studies for the development of strategies and the identification of populations for the State's *Highway Safety Plan* in occupant protection (OP).
- OP is identified as a primary component of the State's *Strategic Highway Safety Plan* and its *Triennial Highway Safety Plan*.
- The Illinois Department of Transportation - Bureau of Data Collection (IDOT BDC) is the State's repository for crash data. The crash data are put through a cleansing process in order to have usable information for analysis. Fatal crash data are posted on a dashboard to allow public access to a high-level summary. IDOT manages the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) program.

- Law enforcement submits crash data to IDOT using the recently revised SR 1050 form. Approximately 96 percent of the law enforcement crash reports are filed electronically with the remaining four percent coming in on paper which must be hand entered. Some of the crash data filed by law enforcement is delayed as the crash investigation may involve potential criminal charges or additional investigation by officers. Once entered the crash data are available for analysis. Illinois Completed Statutes (ILCS), 625 ILCS §5/11-408, sets a 10-day window for filing a crash report. The crash reporting threshold is \$1,500 in property damage or an injury or a \$500 in property damage if a vehicle is uninsured.
- A federally funded grant was obtained to provide laptop computers to the four percent of agencies that are not filing electronic law enforcement crash reports.
- The BSPE is a high-volume user of crash data. The raw data and analysis results are often used in press releases, at events, in grant proposal evaluations, posted on web pages, and to guide mass media campaigns. For these initiatives to be successful, the data must be current and accurate. The BSPE has multiple business needs to have high level access to key data systems beyond the crash data. In order to provide the most accurate and timely information, the BSPE coordinates with other IDOT offices, state agencies, and program partners.

Table 11-1. Illinois Daytime Front Seat (Outboard Only) Passenger Vehicle Occupants, Aged 5 and Over, by Restraint Use: Fatalities and Observed. 2019-2023

Year		Fatalities - Restrained	Observed - Restrained
		Percent	Percent
2019	Illinois	65	94.3
	US	62	90.7
	Best State	80	97.1
2020	Illinois	59	
	US	57	90.3
	Best State	72	95.7
2021	Illinois	57	93.5
	US	58	90.4
	Best State	80	97.2
2022	Illinois	65	93.0
	US	58	91.6
	Best State	77	96.5
2023	Illinois	64	92.9
	US	59	91.9
	Best State	100	98.4

Source: State Traffic Safety Information, U.S. Department of Transportation

- A media report summary is completed after each media campaign and on an annual basis. The report covers the media channels used, the products that were created, the timeline of the various campaigns for seat belt and child passenger safety, message recall, website

visits, and social media metrics. The performance over time for the mass media campaigns are positive and there is a sustained year-round presence.

- The Illinois Secretary of State (ILSOS) manages the vehicle files and the driver files. A systemwide software modernization project is underway. This system update will open up opportunities for more in-depth and linking of driver and vehicle data than is currently possible.
- The Illinois Traffic Records Coordinating Committee is in place to provide a strong coordinated leadership aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of traffic safety related information systems in Illinois. The ultimate goal is to provide a platform for discussion and support implementation of data projects in order to enable the discovery of life saving strategies by ensuring that complete, integrated, and timely traffic safety data are available. The linking of the driver, crash, roadway, vehicle, adjudication, and medical files is accomplished via specific research projects.
- IDOT logs all the fatal crashes and notes vehicle types. This fatal crash information is used to track and report daily fatality counts and supports a fatal crash dashboard.
- A seat belt use survey has been conducted annually since 1985 with the exception of 2020 due to COVID.
- IDOT staff are responsible for observer training, quality control of data collection, and calculation of the final observed use rate. An executive summary of the survey report is provided to BSPE annually. Illinois' current sampling of roadway segments was completed and approved by NHTSA in 2023.
- The FARS Analyst has a “public access” link to the ILSOS driver license files to add driver record information into the national FARS database. A “court access” link would provide the FARS Analyst with a more detailed view to the driver license files.
- IDOT captures vehicle miles traveled in the Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS). The HPMS data are used for safety analysis.
- Illinois Trauma Registry data are available through the Illinois Department of Public Health through a data request and approval process.
- Each law enforcement grantee of the BSPE tracks and submits information related to the number of contacts during their high visibility enforcement campaigns. Law enforcement agencies are also encouraged to conduct seat belt observations before and after specifically funded activities.

7B. CHALLENGES

- Illinois had a total of 1,241 roadway fatalities in 2023. Identifying the risk factors and characteristics associated with those fatalities will require ongoing analysis of the State's available highway safety data.
- Data from NHTSA's FARS revealed that Illinois had 761 passenger vehicle occupant fatalities in 2023. For those fatalities less than 40 percent were known to be restrained.
- Information on restraint use for non-fatal crashes is often dependent on self-reporting to law enforcement. The reliance on restraint use, as recorded on crash reports, may not accurately reflect the belt use rate of a particular region or county.
- Observed seat belt use was 93.0 percent in 2025. The survey does not distinguish between passenger vehicles and pickup trucks, limiting BSPE's ability to develop messaging directed at pickup truck drivers and passengers, which have historically shown lower seat belt use rates.
- The final four percent of law enforcement agencies that are not currently filing electronic crash reports have to obtain their own software to adhere to the upcoming deadline for this transition.
- Citation data may be available from local agencies; however, statewide citation data are not available to the BSPE as a tool to help evaluate the effectiveness of their OP highway safety programs.
- Data from the Racial Profiling Prevention and Data Oversight Board includes data on traffic stops including seat belt violations. There have been no reports generated to evaluate the potential of racial bias in traffic stops involving a seat belt violation.

7C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the observational seat belt survey to allow for the identification of pickup trucks and male/females/unknown.
- Over sample the selected observational seat belt study sites where the Illinois Department of Transportation has determined there is a high fatal or serious injury crash rate. Add additional seat belt observation sites in counties that are not part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's sample where the Illinois Department of Transportation has determined there is a high fatal or serious injury crash rate. The number of observations should be high enough to allow for these additional sites to report a statistically significant seat belt use rate for each

individual site.

- **Generate reports from the Racial Profiling Prevention and Data Oversight Board to evaluate the potential of racial bias in traffic stops involving a seat belt violation.**
- Include seat belt and child safety restraint questions in the attitudinal and awareness surveys.

AGENDA

Illinois Occupant Protection Assessment Agenda

December 8-12, 2025 conducted in Central Time

Monday, December 8, 2025

- 8:30 am – 10:00 am **Interview 1 - Program Management**
Stephane B. Seck – Birhame, P.E., PTOE, Bureau Chief of Safety Programs and Engineering, Illinois Department of Transportation
Allison Conn, Administrative Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Toni Langdon, Finance Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Clint Kassube, Safety Services Unit Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Steve Esslinger, Safety Projects Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
- 10:00 am – 10:15 am Break
- 10:15 am – 11:30 am **Interview 2 - Legislation, Regulation and Policy**
Allison Conn, Administrative Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Jen Cifaldi, Illinois Senior Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor, University of Illinois Springfield
Shannon Alderman, Impaired Driving Coordinator, Illinois Department of Transportation
Jennifer Kuntz, Deputy Chief Counsel, Illinois Department of Transportation
Michael Prater, Chief Counsel, Illinois Department of Transportation
*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Observing all session

11:30 pm – 12:00 pm Break

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Lunch

1:00 pm – 2:45 pm **Interview 3 - Communication**

Aaron Link, Support Services Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

Shannon Alderman, Impaired Driving Coordinator, Illinois Department of Transportation

Ariana Bennick, Senior Account Executive/Senior Agency Planner, DCC Marketing

Sean Martschinke, Bureau Chief of Program, Projects and Safety Outreach, Illinois Department of Transportation

Bree Hankins, Bureau Chief of Communication Services, Illinois Department of Transportation

Guy Tridgell, Director of Communications, Illinois Department of Transportation

Katie Cavanaugh, Account Specialist, DCC Marketing

*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

2:45 pm – 3:05 pm Break

3:05 pm – 3:25 pm **SHSO Debrief/Questions from the day**

3:25 pm – 3:35 pm Break

3:35 pm – 4:05 pm **Assessment Team Debrief**

4:05 pm – Until **Assessment Team Independent Writing**

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

8:30 am – 10:00 am **Interview 4 – Enforcement (Session 1)**

Kyle Baker, Safety Grant Administrator, Illinois Department of Transportation

Lieutenant Chris Anisi, Berwyn, Illinois Police Department

Nathan Leitner, Chief of Staff, Division of Patrol, Illinois State Police

Steve Esslinger, Safety Projects Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Observing all session

Jim Wolf, Law Enforcement Liaison, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police

Lieutenant Andrew Kazenski, Division of Patrol, Illinois State Police, Division of Patrol

*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

10:00 am – 10:20 am Break

10:20 am – 11:50 am **Interview 5 – Enforcement (Session II)**

Kyle Baker, Safety Grant Administrator, Illinois Department of Transportation

Lieutenant Chris Anisi, Berwyn, Illinois Police Department

Nathan Leitner, Chief of Staff, Division of Patrol, Illinois State Police

Steve Esslinger, Safety Projects Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

Trooper Dakota Chapman-Green, Illinois State Police Troop 6

Trooper Christopher Beaupre, Illinois State Police Troop 5

Jim Wolf, Law Enforcement Liaison, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police

*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

11:50 am – 12:00 pm Break

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Lunch/Report Writing

1:00 pm – 2:10 pm **Interview 6 – Outreach (Teen/Adult Focus)**

Lisa Maynard, ThinkFirst Program Coordinator, OSF Saint Francis Medical Center Program

Clare Pfothenauer, Region 2 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Rush Copley Medical Center

Katie Benjamin, Lead Outreach Specialist, Child Passenger Safety Instructor, Northwestern Medicine

Cara (CJ) Comparado, Program Director, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine

Kyle Baker, Safety Grant Administrator, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Observing all session

*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

2:30 pm – 4:00pm

Interview 7 – Outreach (CPS Focus)

Kathy Youngman, Program Coordinator- Advocacy, Injury Free Coalition for Kids of Peoria, State Special Needs Child Passenger Safety Resource Center Liaison, OSF Saint Francis Medical Center

Lisa Maynard, ThinkFirst Program Coordinator OSF Saint Francis Medical Center Program, Director of the Think First Program

Clare Pfothenauer, Region 2 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Rush Copley Medical Center

Wanda Vazquez, Region 1 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Central DuPage Hospital

Shad Edwards, Region 4 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police

Brenden Donahue, Region 3 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police

Nick Heath, Region 5 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, South Illinois University

Cara (CJ) Comparado, Program Director, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine

Katie Benjamin, Lead Outreach Specialist, Northwestern Memorial Healthcare

*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation

4:15 pm – 4:30 pm

SHSO Debrief/Questions from the day

4:30 pm – 5:00 pm

Assessment Team Debrief

5:00 pm – Until

Assessment Team Independent Writing

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

8:30 am – 10:00 am

Interview 8 – Child Passenger Safety

Claire Pfothenauer, Region 2 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Rush Copley Medical Center

*Observing all session

Wanda Vazquez, Region 1, Child Passenger Safety Resource Center,
Central DuPage Hospital
Shad Edwards, Region 4 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Illinois
Association of Chiefs of Police
Brenden Donahue, Region 3 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center,
Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police
Nick Heath, Region 5 Child Passenger Safety Resource Center, Southern
Illinois University
*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of
Transportation
*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois
Department of Transportation

10:00 am – 10:20 am Break

10:20 am – 11:35 am **Interview 9 – Data and Evaluation**

Brian Arnold, Evaluation Manager, Illinois Department of Transportation
Jessica Keldermans, Bureau Chief of Data Collection, Illinois Department
of Transportation
Mark Blankenship, Crash Information Section Manager, Illinois
Department of Transportation
Jennifer Martin, Injury and Violence Prevention Project Manager, Illinois
Department of Public Health
Harold “Mickey” Edwards, Lead Transportation Researcher, University of
Illinois Springfield
Adelisa Orantia, State Trauma Registrar, Illinois Department of Public
Health
Megan Koch, Violence & Injury Prevention Epidemiologist, Illinois
Department of Public Health
*Rochelle Gillespie, At-Risk Behavioral Manager, Illinois Department of
Transportation
*Sarah Moore, Safety Programs Implementation Manager, Illinois
Department of Transportation

11:35 am – 11:50 am Break

11:50 am – 12:10 pm **SHSO Debrief/Questions from the Day**

12:10 pm – 12:40 pm **Assessment Team Debrief**

12:40 pm – Until **Lunch/Assessment Team Independent Writing**

Thursday, December 11, 2025

8:00 am – Until **Team Member Discussion, Deliberation and Report Preparation**

Friday, December 12, 2025

8:30 am – 10:00 am **Assessment Team Report to the State, NHTSA, and others invited by the State**

ASSESSMENT TEAM CREDENTIALS

MARIAN ADAMS

Maradams1@gmail.com

Marian Adams graduated from the Pennsylvania State Police Academy and served more than 26 years with the Pennsylvania State Police. After patrol assignments, she became the Federal Grants Manager, overseeing major traffic safety initiatives including Occupant Protection (Click It or Ticket), and DUI Enforcement, as well as the Construction Zone Management Program.

A pioneer in child passenger safety, Marian implemented the first State Police Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Program in 1996 and helped launch the nation's first standardized CPS course, which she continues to teach. In 2001, Marian played a pivotal role in enhancing child passenger safety by establishing the Pennsylvania State Police Child Passenger Safety Fitting Stations. Through this initiative, she was instrumental in providing critical resources and services to ensure the safety of young passengers throughout the Commonwealth.

Beyond setting up these fitting stations, Marian trained thousands of professionals in CPS across the nation. Her dedication to education and outreach extended to presenting sessions at local, state, and national conferences, where she shared her expertise and best practices with a wide audience of law enforcement personnel, safety advocates, and community members.

Her leadership earned her two Governor's Highway Safety Awards and her department multiple IACP Chief's Law Enforcement Challenge awards.

Marian earned a Bachelor of Science from The Pennsylvania State University and has instructed a wide range of courses, such as Standardized Field Sobriety Training, TASER, First Aid, CPR/AED, Aerial Reconnaissance, and TraCS. She served on the National Child Passenger Safety Board as the CPS Advocate and chaired the Curriculum Resources Committee.

Following her retirement, Marian worked as a college law enforcement administrator for a few years and now serves as a Child Passenger Safety Consultant. She also volunteers with the American Red Cross Disaster Team, the Pennsylvania State Police Museum, the Gray Nation, Daughters of American Revolution and Safe Kids Chapter, continuing her lifelong commitment to public safety and community service

TROY COSTALES

Troy.coastales@comcast.com

Mr. Costales was the state of Oregon's Transportation Safety Division Administrator and Governor's Highway Safety Representative from 1997 until 2021. During his time as the Governor's Representative, he worked for three different Governors. Troy has over 40 years of experience in Transportation Safety, including 24 years as the Administrator of the Division.

Mr. Costales was the 2011-2012 Chairman of the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA). He also served on the: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) – Standing Committee on Highway Safety, AASHTO's Strategic Highway Safety Plan initiative, NHTSA's Impaired Driving program management course writing team, Transportation Research Board's Transportation Safety Management Committee and the Naturalistic Driving Data project, International Association of Chiefs of Police - Drug Evaluation and Classification Program Technical Advisory Panel, plus many others. He was part of the faculty for the GHSA Executive Training Seminar for eighteen years.

Mr. Costales was a member and team lead for several driver education, occupant protection, motorcycle safety, bicycle/pedestrian, and impaired driving program assessments over the past twenty-five years.

George Fox University
Bachelor of Science in Human Resource Management

Portland State University
Master of Arts in Public Administration

MANDI SEETHALER

mandi@safealaskans.org

Mandi Seethaler is the Deputy Director of the Center for Safe Alaskans, where she oversees statewide programs and key organizational operations. A nationally recognized leader in child passenger safety, she has been a certified Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Technician since 2010 and a lead instructor for more than thirteen years. Since 2014, she has served as the Statewide CPS Coordinator for the Alaska Highway Safety Office, leading training, coalition building, conference planning, and statewide program development. She was honored as the National Child Passenger Safety Technician of the Year in 2012.

Mandi's national service includes six years on the National Child Passenger Safety Board, where she served as Chair (2021–2022) and contributed to the 2020 and 2024 revisions to the National Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification curriculum. She helped develop the 2022 hybrid training model and has provided technical content, photos, and videos used in training nationwide. She also contributed to the *2024 GHSA/State Farm Child Passenger Safety Roadmap* publication.

At Safe Alaskans, Mandi manages the statewide CPS program, instructs courses statewide, and supports key occupant protection research, including the Alaska Booster Seat Observational Studies and the Alaska Occupant Protection Use Survey. She is also a certified CarFit Technician, contributing to adult driver safety programming.

NORRAINE WINGFIELD
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Norraine Wingfield is a retired Director of Traffic Safety for DCCCA, where they oversaw the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office and the SAFE Programs in Oklahoma and Missouri. Norraine Wingfield managed traffic safety education, marketing, and digital resources for the Kansas Department of Transportation Bureau of Traffic Safety and Technology. Norraine Wingfield holds a degree from the University of Kansas and is a certified Child Passenger Safety Instructor and Technician, State Child Passenger Safety Coordinator, and instructor for AAA and AARP Driver Safety Programs. Norraine Wingfield has served on the National Child Passenger Safety Board and the National AARP Driver Safety Advisory Committee.

Currently, Norraine Wingfield works as a Traffic Safety Consultant, supporting states in all aspects of traffic safety. Norraine Wingfield has participated in 14 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) assessment teams, providing recommendations for state programs. Norraine Wingfield is a member of the Kansas Department of Transportation Drive to Zero coalition and assists with Child Passenger Technician Certification Training in Kansas and Missouri.

Norraine Wingfield is an experienced speaker at national and regional traffic safety conferences and has contributed to the development of recognized programs such as the Child Passenger Safety Instructor Development Course, SAFE—Seat belts Are for Everyone, Booster to Belts, and Safety Break. Norraine Wingfield has also served as a panel member for the Transportation Research Board Older Driver RFP/Grant. Awards include the 2016 Kansas People Saving People Award and the Order of Distinguished Member of the Garrison for work with Fort Riley. Norraine Wingfield serves as a board member for the Territorial Capital Museum and currently serves as a council member for the Lecompton City Council.