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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

While motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths among children for every age from 1 to 14 years in the United States, there has been a 16 percent decline in motor vehicle occupant deaths from 1988 to 2001. During the same period, motor vehicle occupant nonfatally injured children under age 15 decreased by 11 percent. The Nation is reaping the benefits of the many years of hard work by State and local advocates promoting correct use of child safety seats, booster seats and safety belts. A valuable cadre of trained and certified child passenger safety technicians has been established in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to promote the correct use of these occupant protection devices. To maintain the gains, it is essential that this child passenger safety infrastructure be sustained.

For this fourth year of the program, States are encouraged to perform a program review and comprehensive evaluation of the existing infrastructure to help them strategically place limited resources to meet their unique needs, and to ensure that the needs of culturally diverse and underserved populations, special needs and booster seat size/age children are appropriately addressed.

Motor vehicle injuries and fatalities occur when children ride unrestrained or are improperly restrained. The Child Passenger Protection Education grant program is intended to help reduce injuries and deaths by educating the public about the importance of correctly installing and using child safety seats, booster seats and safety belts.

1. Children Riding Unrestrained

Approximately 20–25 percent of children ages 1 through 15 years ride unrestrained. Child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injury in a crash by 71 percent for infants (less than 1 year old) and by 54 percent for toddlers (1–4 years old). In 2001, there were 497 passenger vehicle occupant fatalities among children under 5 years of age. Of those 497 fatalities, where restraint use is known, 242 (49 percent) were totally unrestrained. The problem of riding unrestrained is not limited to infants and young children. From 1975 through 2001, the lives of an estimated 5,085

children were saved by the use of child restraints (child safety seats or adult safety belts). In 2001, among children under age 15 who were killed as occupants of passenger vehicles, where restraint use was known, 55 percent were not using safety restraints at the time of the collision.

Examination of the demographics of children killed in motor vehicle crashes (for which the most complete data available is 1999) shows that safety restraint use differs markedly by race. For example, while somewhat less than half (46.5 percent) of white children up to age 9 riding in passenger motor vehicles were using safety restraints at the time of their deaths, that was true of less than one-third (30.4 percent) of black children. Native American children under age 15 have a motor vehicle occupant death rate twice that of white children. (Injury and fatality data for other minority groups is currently being collected.) Restraint use is also lower in rural areas and low-income communities. Lack of access to affordable child safety seats and booster seats contributes to a lower usage rate among low-income families. However, research shows that 95 percent of low-income families who own a child safety seat use it. Improving access to affordable child restraint systems and educating parents and caregivers about proper installation and use are key components to improving use rates in these communities.

2. Misuse of Child Safety Seats and Improper Seating Positions

According to the National Occupant Protection Use Survey, in 2002, 99 percent of infants (children under age 1) were restrained while riding in motor vehicles, as were 94 percent of toddlers (children ages 1 through 3). The study also revealed that 83 percent of children ages 4 through 7 were restrained. However, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of children who are placed in child safety seats are improperly restrained. Furthermore, adult safety belts do not adequately protect children ages 4 to 8 (about 40 to 80 pounds) from injury in a crash. Although car booster seats are the best way to protect them, only 6 percent of booster-age children are properly restrained in car booster seats.

In addition, there is a high risk of severe injury or fatality to children riding in the front seat of vehicles equipped with a passenger side air bag, due to the deployment force of the air bag. However, even if the air bag is shut off or there is no air bag, the back seat is the safest place for children to ride. Under no circumstances should a parent

place a rear-facing infant seat in front of an air bag. It is estimated that children ages 12 and under are 36 percent less likely to die in a crash if seated in the rear seat of a passenger vehicle.

Furthermore, children are not cargo; they should not ride in the rear of pickup trucks. In 2001, 128 people died as a result of riding in the cargo area of pickup trucks. Nearly half of these were children and teenagers.

Children with special health care needs are another area of growing concern. Approximately 12 million children under 18 are in this category and many have special transportation needs that need to be addressed.

Child passenger safety professionals, educators, emergency personnel and others need to be adequately trained on all aspects of child restraint use in order to help reduce the problems of misuse and encourage the safest seating positions for all children riding in motor vehicles. In addition, parents and caregivers need easily accessible locations where they can receive information on choosing the correct child safety seat for their child, and identifying which child safety seats are compatible with various types of passenger motor vehicles. Parents and caregivers also need to know how to properly install a child safety seat, how to properly secure their child into that seat, and that the safest position in a vehicle is the back seat, away from front passenger air bags and not in the cargo area of pick-up trucks.

With these concerns in mind, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), which the President signed into law on June 9, 1998, established a grant program under Section 2003(b), to promote child passenger protection education and training and authorized \$7.5 million each year for fiscal years 2000 and 2001. In the DOT Appropriation Act of 2002, Congress provided \$7.5 million to fund the Child Passenger Protection Education grant program for fiscal year 2002. For FY 2003, Congress again provided \$7.5 million to fund the Child Passenger Protection Education Grants.

Grants for Child Passenger Protection

Section 2003(b) provides Federal funds to States for activities that are designed to prevent deaths and injuries to children; educate the public concerning the design, selection, placement, and installation of child restraints; and train and retrain child passenger safety professionals, police officers, fire and emergency medical personnel, and other educators concerning all aspects of child restraint use. A State may expend the funds itself