



Alaska State Legislature

Senator Con Bunde
Senate District P

Vice Chair: Senate Finance Committee
Chair: Senate Labor & Commerce Committee
Member: Legislative Budget & Audit Committee

Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 316

“An Act relating to motor vehicle safety belt violations.”

Currently, Alaska state law requires *all* individuals to wear a seat belt while driving or riding in any vehicle. [Senate Bill 316](#) changes the enforcement measures of this law to allow police officers and state troopers to pull over individuals who are not wearing their seat belt. Presently, officers may cite drivers only if they are pulled over for another violation. As a direct result of this legislation, we have the opportunity to save lives, collect millions of dollars in Federal highway funding that comes with compliance of a primary seat belt law and save the state hundreds of thousands of dollars in emergency, rehabilitative and insurance costs annually.

Motor vehicle accidents are the *leading cause of death* for Americans of every age from 6 to 33 years of age and Alaska has one of the leading accident related death rates of all 50 states. Although seat belt use is required by statute and is the single most effective safety device in preventing injuries and fatalities, we are currently unable to enforce its use. In Alaska, a change in enforcement powers would lead to a 10-15% increase in seat belt use. That increase alone will prevent hundreds of injuries and save 6 lives each year.

The State of Alaska will automatically receive \$3,921,250 as a one time Federal grant for enacting a primary seat belt law (U.S. Department of Transportation, [SAFETEA](#) Primary Safety Belt Law Incentives Program). The grant may be used towards any road improvement plan statewide, including work on guardrails, new lanes, hazard elimination or any needed repairs. Additional funds to run advertisement campaigns and awareness programs will also be available based on current seat belt use and public compliance with the law.

Lastly, the primary enforcement seat belt law has been proven to save billions of dollars that society bears annually from motor vehicle accidents. Eighty-five percent of all costs involved in a motor vehicle crash are borne by society. On a national level in 2000, the total cost of motor vehicle crashes was over *230 billion dollars* (Alaska paid nearly a half a billion dollars), a cost of \$820 per person (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration). Safety belt usage saves approximately 50 billion dollars annually; conversely we spend an *extra 26 billion* on non-use.

Enacting a primary seat belt law may save more lives than any other single piece of legislation we consider this session. Currently, 20 states plus the District of Columbia have chosen to enforce a primary seat belt law. If every state did, we would save 1,900 lives, prevent 49,000 injuries and save Americans billions of dollars in health care, taxes and insurance costs in the first year alone. This bill saves money and lives. I urge you to consider the evidence before you and support SB 316.