

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1460

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Transportation

**Title:** An act relating to enforcement of safety belt laws.

**Brief Description:** Enforcing seat belt laws as a primary action.

**Sponsors:** By Representatives Lovick, Jarrett, Hurst, Jackley, Cooper, Fisher, Edmonds, Morell, Ahern, Ogden, Simpson, O'Brien, Darneille, Kagi and Ruderman.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Transportation: 1/14/02, 1/24/02 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Seat belt laws are enforced as a primary action.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Fisher, Chair; Cooper, Vice Chair; Lovick, Vice Chair; Mitchell, Ranking Minority Member; Edwards, Haigh, Hankins, Jackley, Jarrett, Morell, Murray, Ogden, Reardon, Rockefeller, Romero, Simpson and Woods.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Anderson, Armstrong, Ericksen, Hatfield, Holmquist, Mielke, Schindler, Skinner and Wood.

**Staff:** Penny Nerup (786-7335).

**Background:**

Except for those laws specific to children six years of age and under, Washington's seat belt laws are a secondary action, meaning that an infraction can only be written after the officer stops the vehicle for another suspected traffic infraction, a violation of an equivalent local ordinance, or some other offense. Safety belt use laws are the only laws in America that make a distinction between primary (also known as "standard enforcement") and secondary enforcement.

Seventeen states, including California and Oregon (and British Columbia), have primary enforcement of seat belt laws. Studies show that seat belt usage rates in those states average 17 percent higher than states with secondary laws.

Studies also show that wearing seat belts saves lives and reduces the severity of injuries in a crash. The economic benefit of a primary law in Washington, as estimated by the National Traffic Safety Administration, is more than \$60 million per year.

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**Summary of Bill:**

Wearing a seat belt is enforced as a primary action.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** There is no question that wearing seat belts saves lives and prevents serious injuries. Seat belts do not prevent crashes but can prevent serious injuries or death; in other words, they can change the outcome of a crash. Not wearing seat belts is a major cause of death for African-Americans; young African-American men are three times as likely to die in car crashes because they are unbelted. There is a huge financial impact to the state because 85 percent of the costs of unbelted persons go to society.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Representative Lovick, prime sponsor; John Moffat, Washington Traffic Safety Commission; Dr. Maxine Hayes, Department of Health; Chief Ronal Serpas, Washington State Patrol; Sid Morrison, National Safety Council; Tony Orange, Commission on African-American Affairs; and Wayne Smith, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers.