

169.685 SEAT BELT; PASSENGER RESTRAINT SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN.

Subdivision 1. **Requirement; exemptions.** After January 1, 1964, all new motor vehicles, not exempt from Minnesota license fees, other than a bus, school bus, motorcycle, motorized bicycle, farm tractor, road tractor, and truck, sold or offered for sale or registered in Minnesota shall be equipped to permit the installation of seat belts in the front seat thereof.

Subd. 2. **Required after registration.** Within 30 days after the registration of such motor vehicle, it shall be equipped with seat belts installed for use in the left front and right front seats thereof.

Subd. 3. **Standards.** The specifications and requirements for seat belts or seat belt assemblies shall conform with the minimum standards for seat belts or seat belt assemblies heretofore adopted by the Society of Automotive Engineers and in effect on January 1, 1963.

Subd. 4. **Admissibility into evidence.** (a) Except as provided in paragraph (b), proof of the use or failure to use seat belts or a child passenger restraint system as described in subdivision 5, or proof of the installation or failure of installation of seat belts or a child passenger restraint system as described in subdivision 5 shall not be admissible in evidence in any litigation involving personal injuries or property damage resulting from the use or operation of any motor vehicle.

(b) Paragraph (a) does not affect the right of a person to bring an action for damages arising out of an incident that involves a defectively designed, manufactured, installed, or operating seat belt or child passenger restraint system. Paragraph (a) does not prohibit the introduction of evidence pertaining to the use of a seat belt or child passenger restraint system in an action described in this paragraph.

Subd. 5. **Violation; petty misdemeanor.** (a) Every motor vehicle operator, when transporting a child who is both under the age of eight and shorter than four feet nine inches on the streets and highways of this state in a motor vehicle equipped with factory-installed seat belts, shall equip and install for use in the motor vehicle, according to the manufacturer's instructions, a child passenger restraint system meeting federal motor vehicle safety standards.

(b) No motor vehicle operator who is operating a motor vehicle on the streets and highways of this state may transport a child who is both under the age of eight and shorter than four feet nine inches in a seat of a motor vehicle equipped with a factory-installed seat belt, unless the child is properly fastened in the child passenger restraint system. Any motor vehicle operator who violates this subdivision is guilty of a petty misdemeanor and may be sentenced to pay a fine of not more than \$50. The fine may be waived or the amount reduced if the motor vehicle operator produces evidence that within 14 days after the date of the violation a child passenger restraint system meeting federal motor vehicle safety standards was purchased or obtained for the exclusive use of the operator.

(c) At the time of issuance of a citation under this subdivision, a peace officer may provide to the violator information on obtaining a free or low-cost child passenger restraint system.

(d) The fines collected for violations of this subdivision must be deposited in the state treasury and credited to a special account to be known as the Minnesota child passenger restraint and education account.

(e) For the purposes of this section, "child passenger restraint system" means any device that meets the standards of the United States Department of Transportation; is designed to restrain, seat, or position children; and includes a booster seat.

Subd. 6. **Exceptions.** (a) This section does not apply to:

(1) a person transporting a child in an emergency medical vehicle while in the performance of official duties and when the physical or medical needs of the child make the use of a child passenger restraint system unreasonable or when a child passenger restraint system is not available;

(2) a peace officer transporting a child while in the performance of official duties and when a child passenger restraint system is not available, provided that a seat belt must be substituted;

(3) a person while operating a motor vehicle for hire, including a taxi, airport limousine, and bus, but excluding a rented, leased, or borrowed motor vehicle; and

(4) a person while operating a school bus that has a gross vehicle weight rating of greater than 10,000 pounds.

(b) A child passenger restraint system is not required for a child who cannot, in the judgment of a licensed physician, be safely transported in a child passenger restraint system because of a medical condition, body size, or physical disability. A motor vehicle operator claiming exemption for a child under this paragraph must possess a typewritten statement from the physician stating that the child cannot be safely transported in a child passenger restraint system. The statement must give the name and birth date of the child, be dated within the previous six months, and be made on the physician's letterhead or contain the physician's name, address, and telephone number. A person charged with violating subdivision 5 may not be convicted if the person produces the physician's statement in court or in the office of the arresting officer.

(c) A person offering a motor vehicle for rent or lease shall provide a child passenger restraint device to a customer renting or leasing the motor vehicle who requests the device. A reasonable rent or fee may be charged for use of the child passenger restraint device.

Subd. 7. **Appropriation; special account.** The Minnesota child passenger restraint and education account is created in the state treasury, consisting of fines collected under subdivision 5 and other money appropriated or donated. The money in the account is annually appropriated to the commissioner of public safety to be used to provide child passenger restraint systems to families in financial need, school districts and child care providers that provide for the transportation of pupils to and from school using type III vehicles or school buses with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less, and to provide an educational program on the need for and proper use of child passenger restraint systems. Information on the commissioner's activities and expenditure of funds under this section must be available upon request.

History: 1963 c 93 s 1; 1979 c 227 s 2; 1981 c 37 s 2; 1981 c 56 s 1,2; 1983 c 261 s 1; 1986 c 444; 1987 c 73 s 1,2; 1988 c 415 s 1; 1993 c 74 s 1; 1994 c 635 art 1 s 14,15; 1999 c 106 s 1; 2009 c 82 s 1; 2010 c 356 s 2; 2012 c 287 art 4 s 23,24; 2014 c 255 s 18