

## Statement

### **Alan Maness, Associate General Counsel State Farm Insurance Companies**

Good morning, I am Alan Maness, with State Farm Insurance Companies, and I would like to discuss some very important auto safety issues addressed in the poll that affect children.

Through Partners for Child Passenger Safety, a multi-disciplinary research program with Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, State Farm has developed an extraordinary database of what actually happens to children in cars when they crash. Findings from this unprecedented multi-year study include the fact that very few children in this country, generally between the ages of 4 and 8, are properly restrained in belt-positioning booster seats as they should be. Current seat belts are designed for adults, not young children.

Our efforts are beginning to improve the situation. Child restraint use among 3- to 8-year olds has nearly doubled since State Farm and CHOP began our child safety partnership- from 25 percent in early 1999 to 49 percent at the end of 2002. To date, 27 states and the District of Columbia have required children in that age range to use booster seats.

So we are very interested in the poll results about auto safety concerns for children.

The poll asked questions about improved child safety seats, essentially whether there was support for seats that are built into the car, rather than having to attach the seat to the car, as almost all parents and guardians do today. **A substantial 79% to 14% majority believes such a permanent seat would be more convenient and easier to use than the separate seat they now use.** Think of these built-in child restraints as a collapsible steering column or a padded dashboard, safety innovations that are fitted into the car, ready to provide safety protection when needed.

**90% of the American people would like to have some type of equipment in their new car to provide better visibility directly behind the vehicle and decrease the likelihood of backing over children,** a growing problem, especially with minivans and sport utility vehicles which have even larger blind spots than normal passenger cars.

And another problem that is more apparent is the fact that children left alone in closed, parked vehicles, especially on warm and hot days, suffer injury and even death. Data from the organization KIDS and CARS points to 42 children dying in 2003 in this way. **Ninety percent (90%) of the public favors state laws that would make it illegal for any parent to leave a child alone in a parked car, and 82% would favor installing a warning device, such as a buzzer, that would alert the driver when a child is left in the back seat.**

This poll focused primarily on some auto safety issues for children, although in previous Lou Harris polls for Advocates, there has been a high level of support expressed for adoption of state booster seat laws, so we will all be working to pass these life-saving laws in every state.

The Senate safety provisions under consideration in Congress right now calls for:

- A study of ways to reduce the incidence of unintentional backovers of children at the rear of vehicles;
- A directive to the federal agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), to establish a database of such incidents;
- A NHTSA report about technologies that can prevent deaths and injuries to children left unattended in vehicles, including those from power windows and hyperthermia;
- A safety standard to require child-safe power window switches and related technology;
- A NHTSA report on seat belt technologies for improved safety of 4 to 8 year olds;
- And a state grant program for booster seat laws.

These provisions will go a long way toward improving the auto safety environment for child passengers throughout the nation, and we call for their adoption.