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### **Gap in California Child Passenger Safety Law Puts Children At Risk**

On September 28th, 2007, a car crash in Sacramento sent 7-year old twins to UC Davis Medical Center with major head trauma, while their 9-year old brother was only treated for lacerations. All three of these children were in seat belts but not boosters!" said Sonja Atkins of Greater Sacramento SAFE KIDS. Booster seats reduce the risk of injury by 58 percent among 4- 8 year olds in side-impact crashes as compared with seat belts alone. These findings support prior Partners in Child Passenger Safety (PCPS) research, which shows booster seats to be 59 percent effective in reducing injury risk to 4- 8 year olds in crashes of all impact directions, according to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Governor Schwarzenegger recently vetoed the bill AB 881. Carried by Assembly Member Mullin, the bill would have legally increased the requirement of drivers to properly restrain children in a car seat or booster seat in the back of motor vehicles until 8 years old or 4'9" tall. The bill matched best practice recommendations from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for booster seat use to 8 years old, 80 pounds, and 4'9".

In 2000, Senator Spier carried SB 567, our current law, requiring children to ride in booster seats until 6 years old or 60 pounds. We were the first State to enact a booster seat law, yet today, California's law does not meet the federal government's recommendations for the safest practice for transporting children. 25 other states now have better laws to protect their children in motor vehicles. Our child passenger safety law leaves children 6 to 8 years and older at risk for injuries caused by poor seatbelt fit. "Parental confusion exists when they look to the law as a safety standard. The law and the safest practice should mirror one another," said Atkins.

We know that a comprehensive statewide Child Passenger Safety Law, along with enforcement and education, motivates parents to protect their children. It provides necessary information about preventing death and injury to our children and messages about public responsibility. Children placed improperly in car seats or in seat belts before they are ready, continue to be placed in harms way. If the governor had passed AB 881, we would have been eligible for up to \$7.48 million in federal funds designated to educate parents regarding proper booster seat use and also provide low income parents with no cost or low cost booster seats through the year 2010.

"Unfortunately, car seat installation can be complicated — but when it comes to the life of your child, isn't it worth it to get it right the first time? We want Sonoma County families to know how to choose and use car seats correctly right from birth." said Beth Dadko, coordinator for Safe Kids Sonoma County. "We understand that parents really do need help and information about child restraints and offer a **free Car Seat Safety Class** monthly for parents and caregivers." Open to all families throughout Sonoma County, the **Car Seat Safety Class** is sponsored by Safe Kids Sonoma County and Kaiser Permanente.

**To register for the Car Seat Safety Class call: Marsha Rozell at 525-5300 ext. 3332**

**For information about Safe Kids call: Sonoma County Health Services at 565-6680**

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