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In April 2022, Maryland lawmakers passed SB 176, a bill that will upgrade the state's law that protects children traveling on our roadways. The new law goes into effect on October 1, 2022, and states that children must be kept rear-facing until at least two years of age, unless the child meets or exceeds the height and weight on the seat's guidelines. Having a seat that properly fits the child is also another important consideration. SB 176 brought Maryland in line with laws in 16 other states (CA, CT, IL, LA, ME, NE, NJ, NY, NV, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, VA, WA) and the District of Columbia.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) state that children should ride rear-facing for as long as possible. Rear-facing child seats do a better job of supporting the head, neck and spine of infants and toddlers in a crash, and the back of the seat takes most of the impact energy. When children ride forward-facing, their heads are thrown forward in a crash, possibly resulting in serious injuries. Before SB 176, Maryland law only required a child to ride in a car seat until reaching at least 4' 9" in height. The Maryland Department of Transportation supported the revision of the law to help guide parents on keeping a child rear-facing, something that was not addressed by the prior law.

The inclusion of age for rear-facing child seats helps law enforcement officers educate drivers on proper child passenger safety and gives clearer guidance for caregivers. Under the prior law, no guidance was provided for rear facing. This new bill helps bring attention to the fact that children under two are better protected in a crash when riding rear facing. Under SB 176, only a written warning may be issued for the first violation, supporting law enforcement's request to use the new law as a teaching moment for drivers rather than a fine.

The October 1 start date gives partners time to build strong campaigns as well as caregivers time to prepare for the change in law. Some who currently have a child in a forward-facing-only seat will find that a convertible seat - one that can be used forward- and rear-facing - may better protect their child. Such seats may also prove to be easier to use and more cost-effective.

Kids in Safety Seats (KISS) supports a volunteer network that offers Car Seat Assistance Programs (CSAP) to the community. A CSAP offers low-cost options (convertible or combination seats) to the public for those in need. Referrals to the programs are made primarily through the KISS Helpline or email.

For more information on selecting the right car seat, please visit NHTSA's website at:  
<https://www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats#car-seat-types>