

TESTIMONY, HB 2157
Presented by James R. Hanni,
for AAA Allied Group
February 10, 2015
House Transportation Committee

Historically, teen seat belt usage has been significantly below adult usage in Kansas. That trend has started to change. As will be well-documented in other testimony, a program to address low seat belt use among young drivers was created in Crawford County in 2009, called SAFE (Seatbelts Are For Everyone, a name adopted by the students). AAA was asked to help provide funds for the first prizes and since then, the program has produced impressive results in raising belt use among teens in SAFE program schools AND confirmed, independently, through county-wide teen seat belt use studies annually (Exhibits A&B). This is a county that has moved teen seat belt use from 38 percent to 86 percent during the program's duration and their baseline program surveys show usage moving from 67 percent to 86 percent in the schools.

The beauty of SAFE is that its effectiveness can be measured in improved seat belt use. It has been honored both locally and nationally for its innovative successes. First, the program was recognized by the Kansas Traffic Safety Conference, in 2010, and in 2011, the program received a special award from the Governor's Highway Safety Association at its annual conference. Resulting from Kansas' success, SAFE programs have begun now in Missouri, Iowa and Oklahoma.

From AAA Kansas' perspective, to-date, the AAA Kansas Traffic Safety Fund trustees have awarded \$151,750 over six years to help the program get legs. Today, this Kansas-born, student-driven SAFE program is operating in about 125 schools in 58 counties, or 20 percent of our schools (See Exhibit C, SAFE KS county map of county schools and the percent of participating schools in each county).

However, that means 80 percent of the eligible Kansas schools have not experienced SAFE yet, largely because of funding. Furthermore, AAA and others cannot be counted on year-in and year-out to sustain even the partial program in place. This program is permanent in nature because it is addressing a change in safety culture among our young people. Now, it has earned, and is deserving of, a permanent statewide funding source so ALL Kansas students may have access.

At the same time, we have a disparity between the seat belt fines for teen and adult violations in Kansas. Simply making the adult fine the same as the teen fine, \$60, could fully fund SAFE in every high school across Kansas, as well as provide additional occupant restraint promotion and education dollars to further reduce costly injuries and fatalities.

This is why AAA, representing over 330,000 Kansas motorists, supports HB 2157, a simple but profound improvement to Kansas traffic safety law that accomplishes two things:

- It provides for EFFECTIVE occupant restraint use education and promotion for ALL Kansas children, through SAFE and other initiatives, as directed by the Secretary of Transportation.
- It provides the necessary funding for such programs by making uniform our seat belt fines, *NOT through taxes, but from voluntary contributions from motorists who choose to violate the law.*



So how do Kansans feel about the current seat belt law and fines? A December, 2014 survey of AAA Kansas members indicated that 84 percent approve of our current, primary enforcement seat belt law. Few Kansas traffic safety issues garner greater favorable support. The number is consistent with Kansas seat belt usage, which in the most recent year reported at 86 percent.

In a December, 2014 survey, AAA Kansas members were asked what they considered a “fair, reasonable and effective” fine for violating the seat belt law. The average of these was \$69 (Exhibit D). Fortunately, NHTSA did a study just 4 years ago to determine the relationship between belt use and seat belt fine levels. The study showed that increasing a state’s fine from \$25 to \$60 was associated with a nearly 4 percentage point increase in both FARS and observed seat belt use. Alternatively, increasing the fine amount from \$25 to \$100 was associated with a nearly 7-point increase.

Besides the overwhelming certainty that public opinion, on average, favors an even higher seat belt fine than we are proposing, Randy Bolin of NHTSA’s Kansas City office reports an average fine of \$59.30 for all the states with usage rates at 90% or higher, using the most recent 2013 information.

Not wearing a seat belt is costly business, not just for the violator, but for anyone with whom they come in contact and every citizen of this state. The costs come in many forms. In 2007, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety commissioned a study that quantified the 2006 societal costs of crashes involving just 15-17 year-old drivers IN KANSAS. Within the 14,031 crashes here that year alone, there were \$34 million in medical costs; \$155 million in work loss costs; \$51 million in property damage costs; \$161 million in lost quality of life, for a total of \$467 million...that’s \$33,285 in costs PER CRASH to society IN KANSAS, or \$3,836 in 2006 dollars, for every 15-17 year old in the state. This financial COST should be worthy of our efforts, let alone the human costs.

We lose about 400 people a year in Kansas from motor vehicle crashes, making it one of the top ten causes of unintentional death in our state and the number one killer of teens. KDOT reports, on average, over half (55 percent) of all people killed in crashes are unrestrained. Accordingly, of all the countermeasures available today to reduce motor vehicle injuries and fatalities in Kansas, *wearing a seat belt or securing a child in a properly installed child safety seat would make the greatest impact on reducing Kansas deaths and injuries in motor vehicle crashes.*

We urge you to favorably recommend this lifesaving measure to the House, that assures both occupant restraint education will be available to all Kansas youngsters in the years ahead AND a permanent culture of safety among our young drivers is achieved for future generations of young Kansans to enjoy, funded through uniform, voluntary contributions from adults who choose to violate the law.

Exhibit A: Crawford County SAFE Baselines Percent Belted

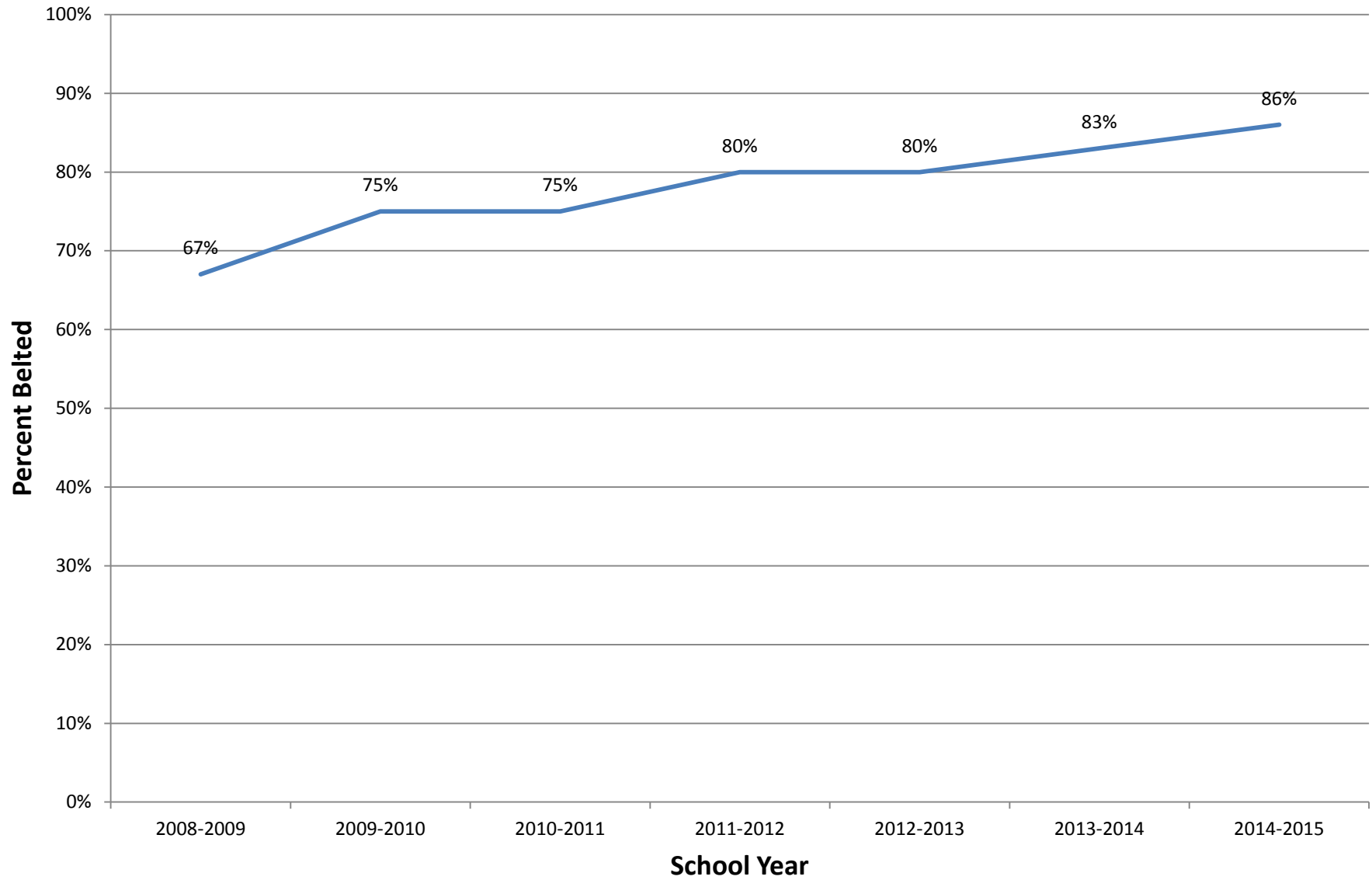


Exhibit B: Crawford County Safety Belt Use Rates from State-Wide Surveys 2007-2014

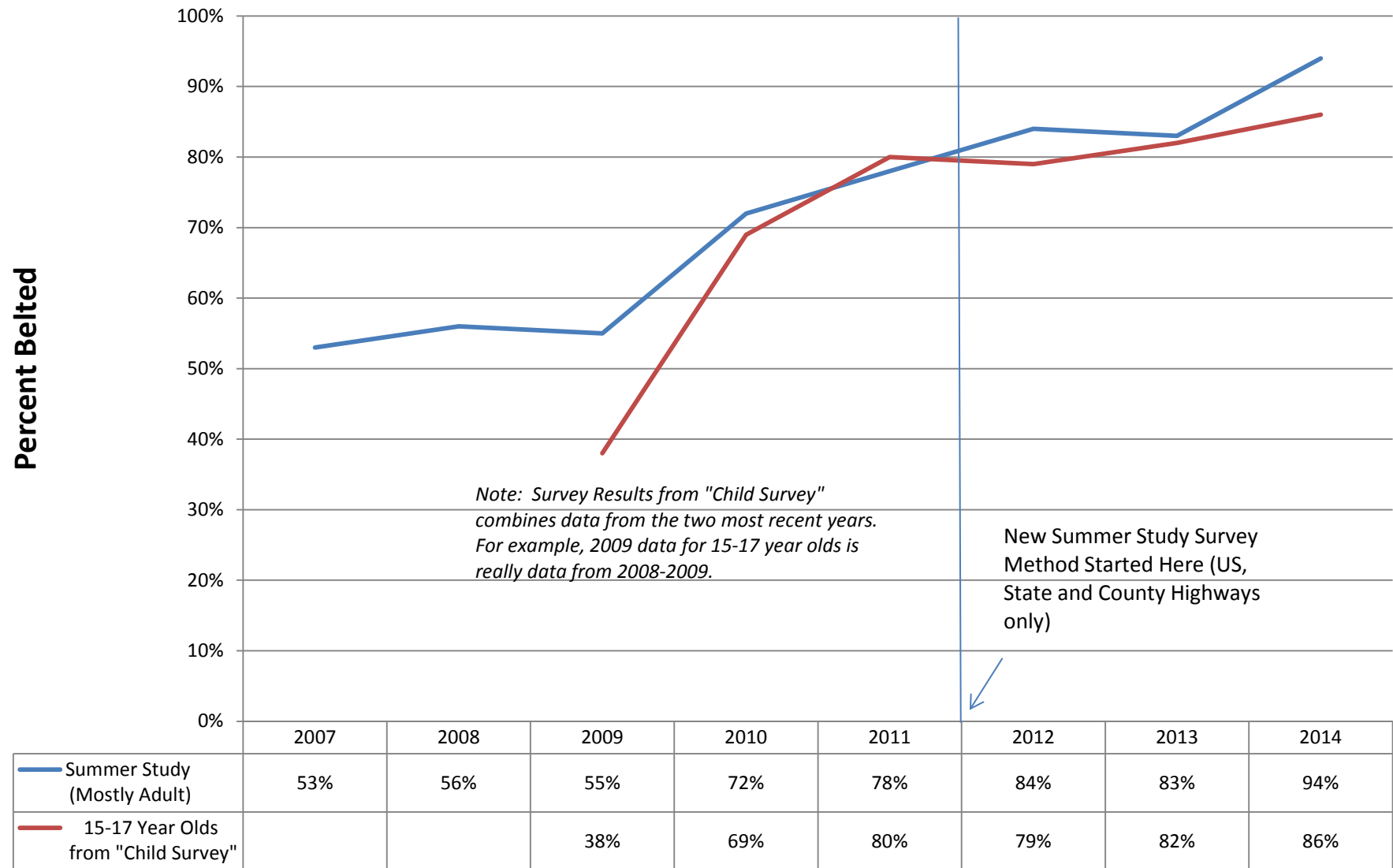
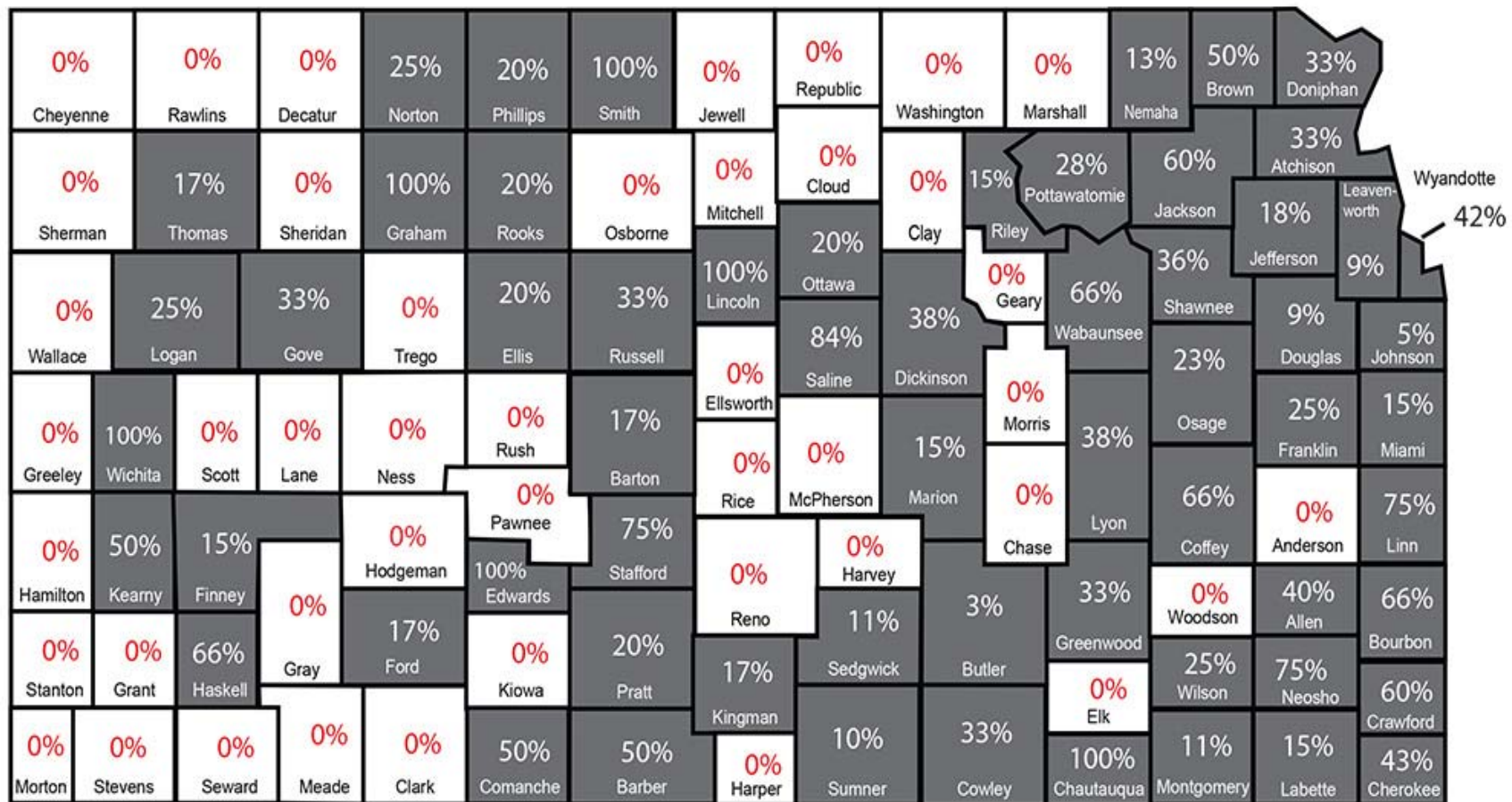


Exhibit C

SAFE 2014 - 2015



1/29/2015

Total % Schools in County

Participating County

127 SAFE Schools

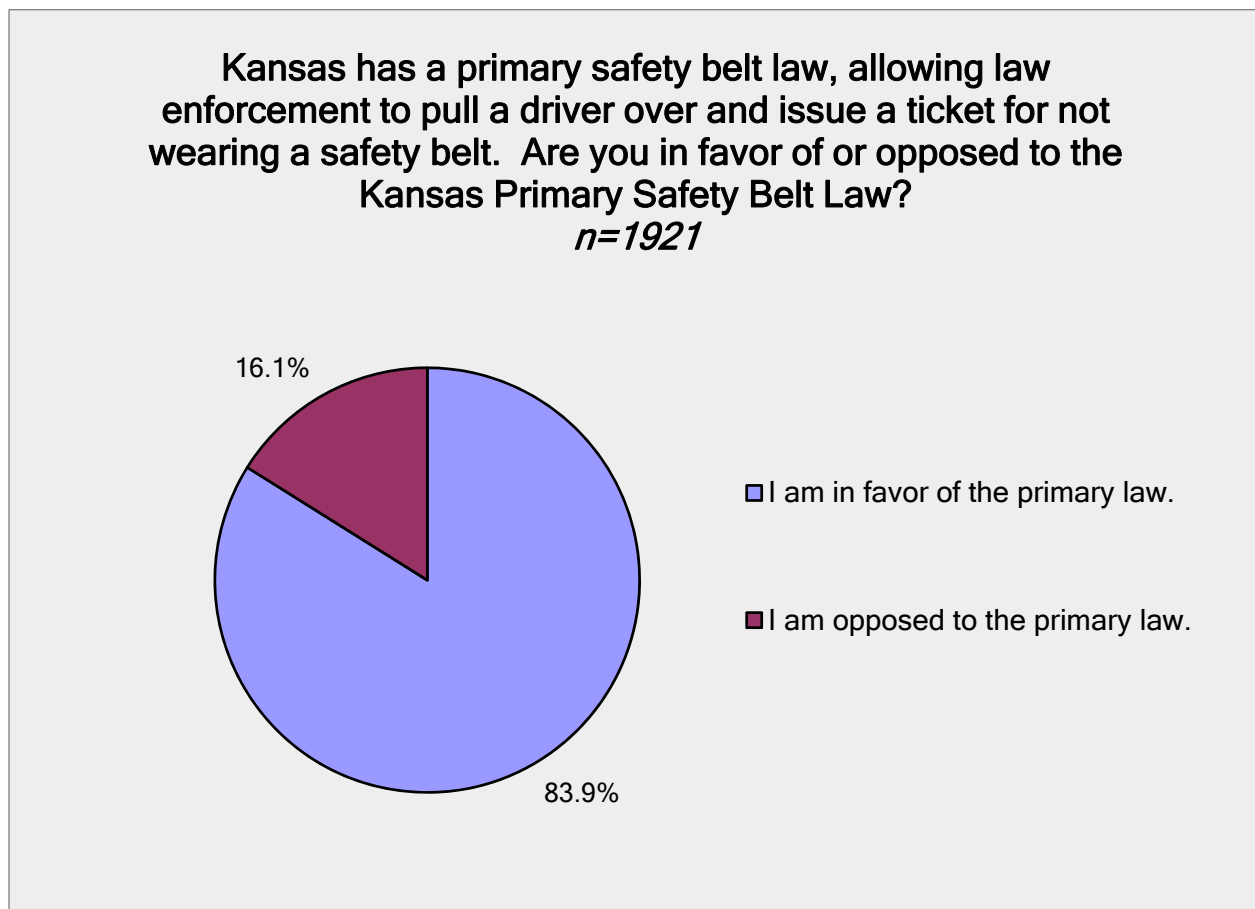
632 Total School

Exhibit D

Support of/Opposition to the Kansas Primary Safety Belt Law

The following graph displays the percent of survey respondents who chose support of or opposition to the Kansas Primary Safety Belt Law.

The survey was conducted December 10th – 15th, 2014. 1921 AAA members responded to this question.



About 84% of respondents indicated support of the Kansas Primary Safety Belt Law.

Fair, Reasonable and Effective Fine

The graph on the following page displays the percent of AAA respondents who indicated the amount of what they consider to be a fair, reasonable and effective fine.

The amount of fine is indicated on the left, vertical column.

The percent of respondents who specified each fine amount is indicated along the bottom, horizontal column.

The most common answer (34%) was \$50.

The second most common (21%) answer was \$100.

The third most common (14%) answer was \$25.

The average answer was \$69.46.

These results were based on responses from the 1067 respondents who indicated a single, numerical answer. Extreme fines were omitted (i.e. in excess of \$500).

Ranges, combinations and other less specific fines were also omitted (*i.e.*, 1st -\$50.00. 2nd-\$75.00; 10% of the individual's weekly income, both earned and unearned, etc.).

Fair, Reasonable and Effective Fine

n=1067

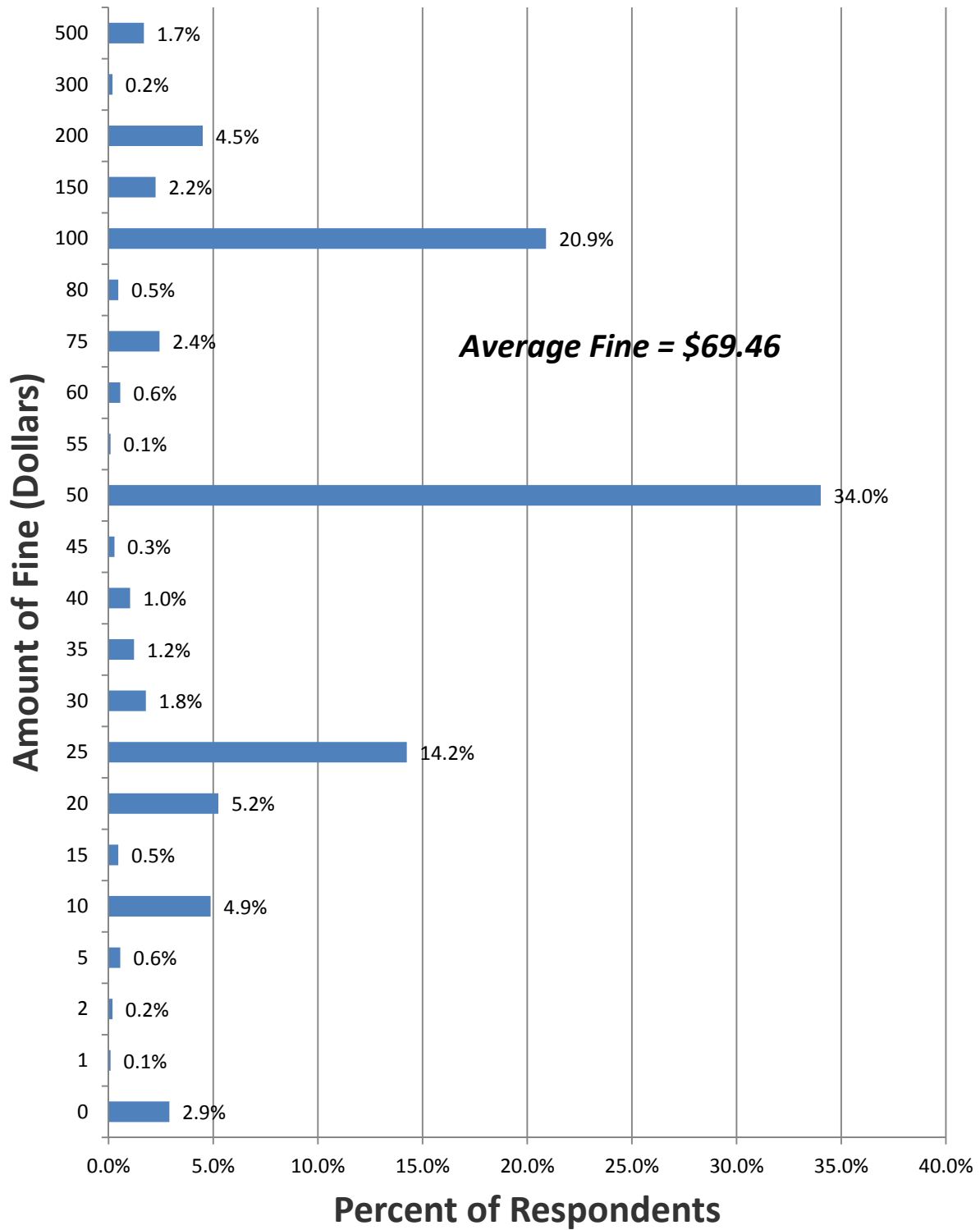


Exhibit E:
Kansas Performance through GDL System Upgrade
&
Introduction of SAFE Seat Belt Education

