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EXHIBIT 6
DATE 3/11/05
SB 43

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
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SB 43 Primary Seat Belt

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. For the record my name is Bill Muhs, from Bozeman. I am currently the Public Policy Liaison for MADD-Gallatin County. As some of the Committee knows, I am also a victim of drunk driving, having lost a daughter to drunk driving.

MADD has for several years had as one of it's highest priority recommendations the implementation of primary seat belt laws in every state. The reasons are simple. First, "increased seat belt usage is the most effective short term way to reduce highway deaths. The only proven way to significantly increase seat belt use is through strong and well enforced laws (Phil Haseltime, president, Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety)". Second, the best defense against a drunk driver is a seat belt. Eighty percent of people who are fatally injured in impaired driving crashes are not wearing seat belts.

Studies have found that states that pass a primary seat belt law increase average seat belt usage by 9 to 14 percentage points. This, in turn, decreases crash fatalities by an average of eight percent. Especially important among teen drivers, who are the most likely to be involved in crashes and the least likely to buckle up (McCartt and Northrup, 2004).

The twenty plus percent of Americans who still do not buckle up in the U.S. generally engage in other high-risk behaviors, including drinking and driving. Since drinking drivers are less likely to buckle up, when primary belt laws are enacted the usage rates for higher risk drivers increase to an even greater extent than that for the average driver.

Some will argue that they should be able to choose not to wear a seat belt. However, seat belt use is the law already in Montana. Also, 85 percent of the costs of crashes are borne by society, not by the individuals in the crash (NHTSA, 2003). Considering that a crash costs 55 percent more when a crash victim is unbelted, we have a financial imperative to enact a primary seat belt law, in addition to the moral and ethical imperatives. MADD strongly supports SB 43 and we urge you to pass this bill.
Thank you.

Bill Muhs
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