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NEWS RELEASE

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Delaware Upgrades Child Restraint Law

Dover – Delaware has upgraded its child restraint law in an effort to better protect the safety of older children riding in motor vehicles. The upgraded Child Restraint Law now requires all children through age 7 or 65 lbs. in weight, to be properly secured in a child safety seat (either an infant, convertible, or booster seat) that is appropriate for their weight and height. Children age 8 or 66 lbs through age 15 are required to wear a properly secured seat belt.

Highway Safety Officials requested the upgrade so that the State would comply with new federal guidelines for transporting children in child safety seats. Previously, Delaware's law required children to be in a child safety seat through age 6 or to 60 lbs.

Safety officials hope that the new guidelines will encourage parents of older children to keep them in booster seats, longer.

“We know that children ages four to eight are often too small to be properly protected by seat belts which were designed to fit an average sized adult,” said Tricia Roberts, Director of the Office of Highway Safety. “These children need the assistance of a seat belt-positioning booster seat to reduce the chances that they will be killed or seriously injured in a car crash.”

Booster seats raise your child up so that seat belts fit and protect them properly. They allow the lap belt to rest low and snugly across their hips and the shoulder belt to rest comfortably across the chest.

Research from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) has shown that the risk of injury is reduced by 59% for children ages 4 through 7 when booster seats instead of seat belts alone are used. Unfortunately booster seat use nationwide is startlingly low at between 10% and 20%. Delaware injury data for 2004 – 2006 reveals a dramatic drop in booster seat use among

children after age five. Based on the CHOP research, the use of booster seats for those who were in seat belts may have prevented many more injuries.

Previous CHOP studies have also found that children placed in seat belts instead of booster seats were three-and-a-half times more likely to sustain a serious injury in a vehicle crash. In a crash a seat belt cutting across the neck or face or riding up over the stomach, can cause severe internal injuries like severed intestines, damaged spinal cords or head injuries.

For more information about booster seats please contact the Office of Highway Safety at (302) 744-2740 or visit our website at www.ohs.delaware.gov for information on the new child restraint law. A comprehensive list of car seat Fitting Stations statewide can also be found on the website. The inspection service is free at each of OHS's three Fitting Stations located in each county.

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