

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Stephanie Tombrello, LCSW, Executive Director
SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., stombrello@carseat.org, (310) 222-6860

SAFETY EXPERTS HIGHLIGHT TRAGEDY AS 6-YEAR-OLD ORANGE COUNTY BOY KILLED, BOTH DRIVERS ARRESTED FOR DUI

ALTADENA, CA (August 4, 2015) – A six-year-old boy was killed yesterday in a crash in which both drivers – including the boy’s uncle and legal guardian – are suspected of being under the influence. Moreover, the guardian was violating California law as the youngster was sitting in front without a booster,

The crash, which happened around 12:40 pm in Santa Ana, occurred when the vehicle in which the child was traveling failed to yield at the intersection between Bristol Street and St. Andrew Place. The child, who was traveling in the front passenger seat, was taken to UC Irvine Medical Center but died during surgery. His uncle is in a critical condition. Both drivers are suspected by Santa Ana police as being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The scenario is all too familiar to Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. “Almost 400 kids die on our roads each year in DUI-involved crashes, and many more are injured. Twenty-five percent of the crashes that kill children involve alcohol. Most of these kids aren’t placed at risk by a stranger but by the person driving the vehicle **in which they are riding.**”

The trauma suffered by vulnerable children makes Tombrello angry. “A child lost his life today because two adults chose to drive after drinking or taking drugs. Too many kids are killed

or injured by the actions of people who should protect them. These deaths and injuries are entirely preventable. If you are a parent or guardian and you have a substance abuse problem, you need to know that you are putting your children at risk. Get treatment — before your child becomes another DUI statistic.”

Supported by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. is campaigning to reduce the number of children killed or injured in DUI-related incidents by making parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies aware that impaired drivers are especially dangerous when driving with children. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends that:

- Enhanced penalties be faced by DUI drivers who drive with children in the car.
- Child endangerment charges be brought against parents who allow their kids to be driven by a DUI driver.
- The media highlight this little-known risk to children, so that parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies are made more aware of the severity of the risk of impaired driving to children.
- Civil courts ensure that children are not put at risk by DUI parents through court-mandated visitation rights; and driving with children while impaired be clearly stated as a consideration in custody or visitation decisions.
- Criminal courts address the issue of impaired driving with children in the car when sentencing DUI drivers.
- Parents educate themselves and their children about how they can protect themselves from impaired drivers. Parents can teach their children to buckle up in the back seat and need to be good role models by wearing their own safety belts so they are less likely to be injured if they are involved in a DUI crash.

Tombrello's message is unequivocal. "Driving while under the influence with a child in the car, or allowing your child to be driven by an impaired driver, is child abuse. We should treat it as such."

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