



Charles M. Hirata

Maui Police Department (Ret)

Seeing children killed and injured in car crashes spurred Charles Hirata to provide a vital service of teaching parents and caregivers the importance of properly using child restraints. As the Commander of the Traffic Section, he saw first how the misuse and non-use of child seats led to tragedies in what would otherwise be preventable.

In 1995, he began holding child seat inspections and in 1997, became the first Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician in the State of Hawaii and in 1998, became one of the first Child Passenger Safety Instructors in the state. He began teaching classes, to include future instructors in Hawaii, Guam, Saipan, and American Samoa. Hirata was known for carrying spare child seats in his police vehicle and would provide the seat to a family in need if he came across an unsecured child in the field.

Hirata made it a priority to obtain and distribute child restraints to rural districts located on adjacent islands in Maui County. These islands lacked stores that sold child restraints and Hirata ensured that each rural district had a fitting station to serve the community. When Hawaii's child restraint law only covered children through age 3, Hirata lobbied the legislature to pass a new law that required the use of a child restraint or booster seat through age 7. He met with the Governor to garner her support for the bill and was assured that she would sign the bill if the legislature passed it. Hawaii's new child passenger safety law became effective on January 1, 2007.

In addition to Child Passenger Safety, Lt. Hirata was honored by MADD for his efforts to combat impaired driving and again for his efforts to prevent underage drinking in Maui County. He developed a program to use the Preliminary Breath Testing (PBT) in Maui County. As a result, all police departments in Hawaii use PBTs and their use was later incorporated into state law. Under his leadership, Maui County started the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) pilot program which also became a statewide program.

Hirata was also instrumental in raising Maui County's seatbelt use rate to one of the highest in the country through the Innovative grant program from the National Highway

Traffic Safety Administration. Hirata submitted testimony to create new laws and to strengthen Hawaii's roadblock statutes. His lobbying efforts resulted in the passage of Hawaii's Universal Seatbelt Law.

Although retired from the Maui Police Department in 2010, Hirata serves on the State Strategic Highway Safety Plan, the State Highway Safety Council, and with the Statewide Child Passenger Safety Coordinators. He also serves as a trustee for a private high school in Honolulu. He continues to lobby for better occupant protection laws and is a firm believer in injury prevention. He continues to serve as the Child Passenger Safety Coordinator for Maui County.

