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Stephanie Tombrello Honored at International Gathering of Child Safety Professionals

Safe Kids Pioneer Award recognizes exceptional efforts to protect kids from preventable injuries, the leading cause of preventable death to children in the U.S.

October 20, 2025(Altadena, CA) – Stephanie Tombrello was honored with the Safe Kids Pioneer Award on October 17 at the Safe Kids Worldwide International Childhood Injury Prevention Convention (PrevCon) for her outstanding contributions toward preventing childhood injuries.

The Safe Kids Pioneer Award recognizes an individual or group of individuals whose groundbreaking or innovative contributions made a lasting and significant impact in the field of child injury prevention.

The award was presented at the three-day gathering that convened more than 600 child health and safety professionals from around the world, including academic researchers, community activists, health care providers, manufacturers, public health and injury prevention practitioners, and policymakers. More than 20 individuals and organizations were honored for their leadership in the field.

“Stephanie is truly the matriarch of child passenger safety,” said Torine Creppy, president of Safe Kids Worldwide. “Her pioneering vision and tireless work have changed how families protect children in cars. She has inspired generations of safety advocates around the world.”

For more than 50 years, Stephanie Tombrello has been at the forefront of efforts to improve car seat safety, legislation, and public awareness. Her work began in the 1970s, as a volunteer, and in 1980, she co-founded SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. and championed the first state child occupant protection laws in the country. She helped design early child-passenger-safety curricula, collaborated with national partners including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and served on numerous task forces shaping U.S. policy. Her advocacy and educational efforts transformed safety seat use from under 10% in the 1970s to more than 90% today, saving countless children’s lives.

Tombrello said, “I am overwhelmed by recognition by SAFE KIDS Worldwide before my peers at PreCon and accept in memory of Annemarie Shelness, teacher to all of us and of my late daughter Kerstin Arusha, who propelled me to successfully protect her with the first crash-tested safety seat, the Ford Tot Guard., changing my life trajectory.

We are not done as there are three significant gaps to fill.

1) Preventing children from riding with impaired drivers, usually parents.

2)Getting all who work with the pregnant to introduce correct belt fit early and often to deal with the high numbers of fetuses lost.

3)Including the 5-Step Test, created through SBS USA 25 years ago, in every state law as Louisiana did in 2019, followed by Minnesota, and just days ago, Governor Gavin Newsom signed it into California law.

PrevCon is one of the largest gatherings of individuals and organizations dedicated to childhood injury prevention. Preventable injuries are the number one cause of death for children in the United States. Throughout the world, almost one million children die of an injury each year, and almost every one of these tragedies is preventable.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., founded by 15 Angelenos in January 1980, grew from serving the Los Angeles area to serving the U.S. as a technical resource for professionals and parents, developing the safety seat checkup, successfully petitioning for rear seat shoulder-lap belts and tools for teaching others to provide service, including early national SAFE KIDS. Early on, the focus was to achieve support for California state law by providing technical information and crafting a section that also benefited health departments throughout the state. Today, SBS USA continues to provide technical webinars bimonthly for all California Child Passenger Safety Technicians and Instructors. Visit our website, carseat.org or call 800/745 SAFE or 800/747 Sano.