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Indiana Traffic Safety Leader is National Child Passenger Safety Instructor of the Year Vasilopulos Recognized for Winning Over Hearts and Innovative Training

ITASCA, IL – Over the years, many who have participated in Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification Training courses led by Kathy Vasilopulos have sampled her well-known homemade peanut butter cups.

Kathy, a resident of Lake County, IN, works as state coordinator for the Child Passenger Safety program within the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute's Division of Traffic Safety. She knows how to serve up the goods – and win over the hearts and minds of her students.

In 2025, she trained 1,156 officers statewide using [Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement](#). Her dedication to child passenger safety dates to when her then 3-year-old daughter was riding in a car seat that was recalled because of a safety issue. Kathy, not realizing it at the time, was embarrassed during her own CPST Certification Course. That experience ignited her commitment to helping others avoid similar missteps.

Today, she is the National Child Passenger Safety Instructor of the Year, an achievement that reflects her ability to teach, mentor and inspire. The award is presented by the [National Child Passenger Safety Board](#) and sponsored by [Toyota Motor North America](#).

"The officers Kathy Vasilopulos trains are advancing the ideal of community policing across the state of Indiana by raising child passenger safety awareness during their interactions with families," National Child Passenger Safety Board Chair Kristel Robison said. "That's real impact. And for that, I say to Kathy, 'Well done!'"

Leading Efforts

Through her work with the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute's Division of Traffic Safety, Vasilopulos:

- Provides statewide expertise in child passenger safety
- Serves as the primary point of contact for CPS initiatives in Region 1

- Collaborates with law enforcement agencies to deepen their engagement in CPS efforts
- Instructs *Car Seat Basics for Law Enforcement* at the Indiana Police Academy
- Supports community programs that reach families across Indiana
- Provides car seat education in a Mother Baby Unit at the Indiana Women's Prison

She has served in her current role for more than four years.

"Indiana has one of the nine Mother Baby Units in prisons in our country," Vasilopoulos said. "These women and the children they deliver while incarcerated get to live together for up to 30 months. The momma's get released with the kiddos and with a whole bunch of new life skills. I am part of the education they receive. This unit is amazing and the recidivism rate is only 12% for the ladies."

Transformative Experience

More than 26 years ago, while serving in law enforcement at the Wheaton (IL) Police Department, Vasilopoulos enrolled in a five-day CPST Certification Course. The class proved life-changing because she learned firsthand how easy it is to misuse a car seat.

Instructors held up her daughter's seat to discuss a major safety recall she had not recognized. The moment sparked her passion to help others avoid similar mistakes.

Rolling Up Her Sleeves

After returning to the Wheaton Police Department, Vasilopoulos wasted no time putting her new training to work. She:

- Launched the department's first car seat program
- Organized community safety check events
- Taught the BuckleBear program in preschools
- Secured grant funding to create a car seat distribution initiative for underserved families

Her early community outreach established a foundation for the statewide leadership role she holds today.

Distinguished Instructor & Mentor

Vasilopoulos, in 19 years as a CPST Instructor, has shaped the careers of thousands of Technicians. She has been recognized previously in a number of ways:

- Received the Advocate and Mentor Award at the 2024 Indiana Child Passenger Safety State Conference
- First was nominated for National Child Passenger Safety Instructor of the Year in 2022
- Earlier, was nominated for Illinois Child Passenger Safety Technician of the Year

Kathy holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management from Benedictine University, graduating Summa Cum Laude.

Her Upbringing, Her Hobbies

Born and raised in Streamwood, IL, Vasilopoulos is the fourth of seven children in a large Irish-Italian family. Outside of work, she enjoys baking, cooking and crafting. Her service extends beyond traffic safety. She volunteers three days each month at her church, supporting adults with special needs.

Vasilopoulos currently lives in Lake County, IN, with her husband, Jim, and three bonus sons, Collin, Shane and Braden. She is also the proud mother of one adult daughter, Alexia Stelmar, a bonus daughter, Sarah Wirtz, and three bonus grandchildren, Lyla, Walker and Rylann.

About the National Child Passenger Safety Board

The National Child Passenger Safety Board's mission is to save lives and prevent injuries by promoting child passenger safety through education, mentorship, engagement and innovation. The Board works with key partners, including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Safety Council and Safe Kids Worldwide. For more information about child passenger safety or the National CPS Board, please visit the Board's website:

cpsboard.org