

On Saturday, July 5th, 2014 my 15 month old son, Benjamin, called me “mama” for the first time. I will never forget the sound of his voice when he said that word, because two days later he was gone. He died from heatstroke after my husband unknowingly left him in the backseat of our car. Since that day, I’ve repeatedly been asked about fault and solutions. The truth is that I will never have those answers. The problem is too complex. Fault is too multifaceted. What I do know is that car manufacturers and the government have known of the risks of vehicular heatstroke for at least a decade and a half, since it was identified by car manufacturers themselves as a serious safety problem and “totally preventable” in 2001. I know that research from past vehicle safety initiatives shows that education alone will not fully mitigate this known risk and eliminate child vehicular heatstroke deaths. Safety advocates have been urging the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (“NHTSA”) and Congress to act for over a decade. I met with David Friedman, then Acting Administrator of NHTSA, a few months after my son died. He looked into my eyes with condolences and promised me that they were working on it. Nothing has happened. They say education is the only solution. However, the current approach is simply not working. Another 29 children have lost their lives this year, bringing the total to 588 since 2001. If there had been notification systems in vehicles, then hundreds of mothers just like me would still have the blessing of holding their children in their arms today. Technology - it accounts for researched and proven faults in human memory, and it can save children’s lives. The HOT CARS Act of 2016 is a step in the right direction. It will require new passenger vehicles to be equipped with technology to provide an alert that a child remains in a rear seated position. An alert that, if implemented over a decade ago, when this discussion began, could have saved my son’s life.

Lindsey Rogers-Seitz, child safety advocate, attorney and Colorado mother of Benjamin Seitz who lost his life after being unknowingly left alone in a hot vehicle in Ridgefield, CT by his father on July 7, 2014.