



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



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**HOT CARS Act of 2017 Introduced Today
Will Prevent Child Heatstroke Deaths by Getting
Much-Needed Technology into Vehicles**

**Many children needlessly die in hot cars each year –
Summer brings extreme risk for these tragedies**

Washington, D.C. (June 7, 2017) – Today, U.S. Representatives Tim Ryan (D-13th OH), Peter King (R-2nd NY) and Jan Schakowsky (D-9th IL) introduced the [Helping Overcome Trauma for Children Alone in Rear Seats Act](#) (HOT CARS Act of 2017, H.R. 2801), a critical piece of legislation that would prevent children from being needlessly killed and injured when unknowingly left alone in vehicles. The bi-partisan effort has already received widespread support from more than twenty of the nation’s leading public health, consumer and safety [organizations](#), as well as an expert in neuroscience and the brain memory system, along with families who have lost their child or were seriously injured due to child vehicular heatstroke. The timing of the bill’s introduction coincides with the kickoff of the National Vehicular Heatstroke Prevention Campaign by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

“No child should endure the tragedy of dying while trapped in a hot vehicle. The unfortunate reality is that even good, loving and attentive parents can get distracted. Studies have shown that this can happen to anyone, anywhere. That is why I am proud to have Representatives King and Schakowsky join me in introducing this important legislation. Our cars can already alert drivers when they leave their keys in the car, their lights on, or their trunk open – none of which are life threatening. It is not unusual for the government to mandate safety features to protect lives. Cars are mandated to have seat belts, interior trunk-releases, and rear backup cameras. Our legislation would move us one step closer to getting this inexpensive technology in every car on the road to help save the lives of children nationwide,” said Congressman Tim Ryan (D-13th OH).

The HOT CARS Act would require the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue a final rule requiring cars to be equipped with a system to alert the driver if a passenger remains in the back seat when a car is turned off.

“Since 1990, nearly 800 children have died from heatstroke in vehicles,” said Rep. Schakowsky (D-9th IL). “My colleagues Rep. Tim Ryan, Rep. Peter King and I are introducing the HOT CARS Act today in hopes of bringing that number down to zero. Even the most attentive parent can get distracted and forget a child in the back seat of their car. To prevent these tragedies, our bill would require all new vehicles to be equipped with an alert system to remind the driver to check the back seat. A simple alert can save lives.”

“The belief is that it can’t happen to you, always someone else. Unfortunately it happens over and over again, even to the most conscientious parents. Technology is available and it can be placed in new vehicles to protect innocent children. It’s really that simple. I am proud to work with Reps. Ryan and Schakowsky on this legislation,” said Rep. King (R-2nd NY).

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety president Jackie Gillan stated, “Already this year nine children have died in hot cars, and the scorching summer days of high temperatures are still ahead of us. Yet, I want to be very clear that this is not just a ‘seasonal’ problem. These deaths are happening year round. The HOT CARS Act takes the same approach as the law enacted by Congress in 2008 that requires rear view cameras as standard equipment in all cars by May of 2018. This is a very reasonable and effective way to stop preventable, unnecessary injuries and deaths.”

“We commend Congressman Tim Ryan, Ranking Member Jan Schakowsky, and Congressman Pete King for their leadership on this very important safety issue. GM is committed to protecting the safety of children in and around our vehicles and has already deployed an industry-first Rear Seat Reminder on many of our 2017 and 2018 models. The Rear Seat Reminder is a simple feature that is intended to do exactly what it says: remind the driver to look in the rear seat before exiting the vehicle, said Dan Turton, vice president of GM North America Public Policy.

Miles Harrison, whose 21-month old son Chase died after being unknowingly left in a car, said, “Every time we hear of another child dying, we re-live that horrible day with them all over again and we ask WHY? Why does this keep happening when there is technology available to prevent it?” He continued, “We need to make sure that Congress mandates a vehicle alarm system to save the lives of our children and eliminate the crushing pain this causes their parents.”

Since 1990, more than 800 children have died in hot cars. Janette Fennell, president and founder of KidsAndCars.org, said, “Children will continue to die in hot cars unless something is done to help our exhausted and overtaxed brains. Education alone will not solve this problem. These unthinkable tragedies can only be prevented with the combination of education and technology. We certainly wish that we could train our memories to ‘never forget,’ but this is a very human condition we all live with.”

Deona Bien’s heartbreaking words spoke directly to many as she said, “No one could ever understand what the parents who have lost children due to heatstroke in a vehicle live through every single day. We now unite as grieving parents to ask for a long overdue alert system in cars so that they can prevent these tragedies from happening to more families. We all long for the day that no other children join ours in heaven.”

In the majority of cases, it is loving and caring parents who unknowingly leave their child in the car. Common stressors like a change in routine or lack of sleep or even simple distractions can all have an effect on even the most responsible parents. Dr. David Diamond, a professor in the Departments of Psychology, Molecular Pharmacology and Physiology at the University of South Florida, said, “The one aspect which is not a factor is that these children were not forgotten by parents who were reckless with regard to care for their children. This modern day phenomenon must be explained from a brain science perspective, not one that blames parents for being negligent.” He continued, “We must have a system that provides a reminder to parents of the presence of a child in the backseat for that rare occasion when a child’s life is in danger because parents, through no fault of their own, lose awareness of the presence of their child in the car.”

Norman Collins, grandfather to “Bishop” Collins who died in a hot car in 2011, said, “I call upon our lawmaking government officials to assist in the effort by supporting and passing the HOT CARS Act to save lives and avoid any more families having to endure the lifelong horror of grief that ours and so many other families have encountered due to the preventable tragedies of hot car deaths. Please help us to turn our pain into power, our tragedy into triumph, and our agony into positive action.”

A video recording of the press conference and additional materials can be found at saferoads.org.

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