

**Statement of
Illinois State Trooper Douglas J. Balder
May 18, 2016**

My name is Douglas Balder from Oswego, Illinois. I have been an Illinois State Trooper since 2007. I am also a Master Chief in the Navy Reserve, have served for the past 21 years and have deployed three times since 9-11. On January 27, 2014, my life was forever changed when a tractor trailer, driven by a fatigued driver, slammed into my parked squad car.

I was assisting a disabled tractor trailer on the Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway in Aurora, Illinois, along with Vincent Petrella, a Tollway assistance vehicle operator, when a second tractor trailer, slammed into my squad car at 63 mph. The gas tank of my car exploded on impact engulfing the car in flames. I was pushed off the road and into a ditch. One of the three steel coils that were on the driver's flat-bed came loose and struck the cab of the Tollway vehicle killing Vincent Petrella. The impact caused me to lose consciousness. When I came to, the immediate feeling of being on fire is something I will never forget. I knew that if I were to survive, I needed to move quickly. I was able to escape my burning squad car through the passenger window and walk to the shoulder to seek help from other first responders who were beginning to arrive at the scene. I suffered multiple broken bones and third degree burns to my entire left side. I spent three months in a burn intensive care unit followed by 9 months of rehab. My vocal cords have still not fully healed and I have many issues with range of motion.

This crash not only changed my life, but my family, friends, and the surrounding community. While I am happy to report that I am now back to full duty for both the Illinois State Police and the Navy Reserve, every day I look at my body and see a constant reminder of pain and suffering that will never go away.

Truck drivers do not need to work more hours; they need the mandated hours off in order to get real rest. Data shows that this is not just a problem that is particular to several drivers, but an industry-wide issue. A staggering 65 percent of truck drivers reported being drowsy while driving and 48 percent admitted to having fallen asleep while driving. Unfortunately an alarming number of truck drivers falsify logs which puts them over hours causing them to often drive fatigued, and puts those driving on the road at great risk when they fall asleep. It's also unfortunate that many companies overlook these log falsifications and some even pressure the drivers to do so. Considering this, along with the fact that four out of five Americans oppose increasing the amount of hours a truck driver can work, it is baffling that Congress is once again trying to do so.

I continue to take to the road every day to do my part to protect people and ensure that the law is upheld. I cannot do my job alone. I urge Congress to take the necessary actions to ensure our safety, not put it at further risk.

Thank You