



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



JUNE 5TH KICKED OFF NATIONAL VEHICLE HEATSTROKE PREVENATION CAMPAIGN

NEWS CONFERENCE & LIVE WEBCAST

**Announcing Legislation to Require Lifesaving Technology
in Cars to Prevent Child Heatstroke in Hot Cars**

Helping Overcome Trauma for Children Alone in Rear Seats (HOT CARS) Act of 2017

Wednesday, June 7, 2017

SPEAKERS

Jackie Gillan, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (www.saferoads.org)

Chief Sponsors of the HOT CARS Act of 2017:

- **U.S. Representative Tim Ryan (D-Ohio-13)**
- **U.S. Representative Peter King (R-New York-2)**
- **U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-Illinois-9)**

David Diamond, Ph.D., University of South Florida, Tampa
Professor of Psychology, Molecular Pharmacology and Physiology
Director, Neuroscience Collaborative Program; Center for Preclinical and Clinical Research on PTSD

Deona Ryan Bien of Charleston, South Carolina
Mother of Aslyn who died February 7, 2004 at age 1 after being unknowingly left in a hot car.

Norman Collins of Raleigh, North Carolina
Grandfather of Norman Lee Van Collins III who died May 29, 2011 at age 3 months after being unknowingly left in a hot car in Mississippi.

Miles and Carol Harrison of Purcellville, Virginia
Parents of Chase who died July 8, 2008 at age 21 months after being unknowingly left in a hot car.

Janette Fennell, President and Founder, KidsAndCars.org

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LIVE WEBCAST of the news conference and an **ELECTRONIC MEDIA KIT** are accessible at
www.saferoads.org

LOCAL NEWS INTERVIEWS: Parents and families who unknowingly left children in hot cars may be available in some states for local news interviews. Please inquire about availability by contacting Amber Andreason at 913-732-2792 or Amber@KidsAndCars.org



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**Statement of Jackie Gillan, President,
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
June 7, 2017**

Good afternoon. My name is Jackie Gillan and I am the President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates). Advocates is a coalition of consumer, health and safety groups and property-casualty insurance companies working together to advance safer cars, safer drivers and safer roads.

Today we are pleased to announce the introduction of legislation, the HOT CARS Act of 2017. The acronym stands for “Helping Overcome Trauma for Children Alone in Rear Seats”. This legislation is essential to save the lives of children who are unknowingly being left in vehicles and dying of heatstroke and to spare families the heartache of such tragic and needless deaths.

The timing of this bill’s introduction coincides with the kickoff of the National Vehicular Heatstroke Prevention Campaign by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Education is important to make the public aware of the dangers but there is a technology solution to save the lives of children. That is why we are here today to discuss the need to enact the HOT CARS Act of 2017.

Already this year nine children have died in hot cars, and the scorching summer days of high temperatures are still ahead of us. While these deaths can happen at any time of year, even in temperatures as low as 60 degrees, the hot summer months pose severe risks for these preventable tragedies. And, as you can see on this map, these deaths are happening in every state across the country.

I am joined here today by the sponsors of the HOT CARS Act, Representatives Tim Ryan of Ohio, Jan Schakowsky of Illinois and Peter King of New York, as well as Founder and President of KidsAndCars.org Janette Fennell, Dr. David Diamond, and several brave and caring families who have been victims of this deadly problem and do not want others to suffer.

Each year, on average, 37 children are killed as the result of vehicular heatstroke. These deaths are agonizing, yet they are completely avoidable. There is proven and available technology that can alert the driver when a child is left in a vehicle.

We have a cure and we must act to make it available to children. What the HOT CARS Act achieves is very simple. All cars would be required to have a system to alert drivers when a passenger is forgotten in the back seat. Cars already have reminders for drivers that the

headlights have been left on or that the doors have been left open or that the keys have been left in the ignition. Why not also have a reminder system that tells us a child has been left behind?

The approach taken in this bill is a proven strategy for achieving past safety technologies as standard equipment to protect every passenger, on every ride, in every car. Auto manufacturers are aggressively promoting and consumers are enthusiastically buying new cars equipped with rearview cameras. As of May next year, all new vehicles will be required to have rearview cameras as standard equipment. Why? Because in 2005 Congress responded to another critical child safety problem by passing bi-partisan legislation directing federal action to improve rear visibility in passenger vehicles.

Children were being unintentionally backed over, oftentimes by their own parents in their own driveways because they could not be seen. And, we had available and affordable technology to solve the problem. This is a tremendous safety victory that was championed by two Members of Congress who are also sponsors of the HOT CARS Act, Congresswoman Schakowsky and Congressman King. The HOT CARS Act is another practical response by safety leaders in Congress who want to protect our children.

Today, we stand here and urge enactment of the HOT CARS bill because we refuse to standby and allow children to needlessly die in hot cars when we have a solution.

Thank you for joining us today. You can find more information about the HOT CARS Act including the press kit on our website, www.saferoads.org.

David Diamond, Professor in the Departments of Psychology, Molecular Pharmacology and Physiology at the University of South Florida
A Scientific Perspective on Why Parents Forget Children in Cars

I have been studying the brain and memory for almost 40 years. The challenge I am faced with as a scientist is to explain how loving and attentive parents can forget a child in their car, rendering the child vulnerable to develop brain damage or to die from heatstroke when the car becomes dangerously hot. In addition to leaving the child in the car, what is baffling to people is how a parent can go about their routine activities for an entire day, unaware their child remained unattended in their car. The public, the authorities, and even the parents themselves, are all bewildered as to why anyone would unknowingly leave a child in a car.

I have studied fatal memory errors involving children in cars for the past 12 years. With the aid of data collection from KidsAndCars.org, I have learned that hundreds of children in the US and around the world have died or suffered brain damage as a result of being unknowingly left in a hot car. With this substantial database, as well as my own interviews with parents that have forgotten children in cars, I have identified several common features of the fatal day's events. The one aspect which is not a factor is that these children were not forgotten by parents that were reckless with regard to care for their children. This phenomenon must be explained from a brain science perspective, not one that blames parents for being negligent.

The first thing to point out is that the brain is composed of many different structures, and each structure has a different function. Two brain structures, called the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex (PFC), work together to enable us to plan to do something in the future. For example, they enable us to make the following plan when we leave home: Today, unlike most days, I'm planning on leaving home with my child, I'll drop off my child at daycare and then I'll go to work. Another brain structure, called the basal ganglia, also helps us to get to work, but it relies entirely on well-established habits. The basal ganglia has the capacity to function at a subconscious level to take us from one place to another, almost without thinking about it. When the basal ganglia is activated we function in an "auto-pilot" mode, as we follow well established routes with minimal thought. The basal ganglia, therefore, can become engaged during a drive to generate a "habit memory" which automatically and subconsciously takes a parent on a commonly driven route.

We know from experimental studies that brain structures engage in a form of competition, in which the hippocampus/PFC system attempts to remind us what is different about today (go to daycare) but this system can be outcompeted by the basal

ganglia, which attempts to take us on a route that has been followed many times before, but one that does not include going to the daycare. This type of phenomenon is actually very common, usually with little consequence. For example, we may have the plan to stop at the store on the way home from work (using our hippocampus/PFC), but somewhere en-route, the basal ganglia takes charge, directing us to go directly home, and in the process, produces a complete loss of awareness of the person's original plan to stop at the store along the way.

In the dozens of cases I have studied in which children are left in cars it appears that the basal ganglia of these parents outcompeted the hippocampus/PFC system to suppress their awareness of the presence of their children in the cars.

Two factors that bias the basal ganglia to outcompete the hippocampus/PFC system are stress and sleep deprivation. It is commonly reported that on the day a child is forgotten, a stressed and sleep-deprived parent intended to follow a route to daycare, but somewhere along the drive the basal ganglia redirected the parent to drive a commonly driven route that did not include the stop at daycare. Therefore, the neurobiological basis for why parents forget children in cars is the dominance of the basal ganglia, which suppresses the hippocampus/PFC system, causing the parent to lose awareness of the child in the car as it directed the parent to drive straight to work, instead of to daycare.

It is also important to point out that these parents commonly report events of the day, including talking about their child with co-workers, and that they had to leave work on time to pick up their child from daycare. All the while, they were completely unaware their child had remained in the hot car all day. This occurs because the brain created the false memory that their plan to take the child to daycare had been accomplished. Therefore, they went about their normal daily activities because they believed their child was at daycare.

There is no doubt that competition between brain memory systems in normal, attentive parents is the basis of why children have been forgotten in cars. When the basal ganglia out competes the hippocampus/PFC system we subconsciously make fatal memory errors. This is a phenomenon that occurs without awareness in the best of parents. Therefore, we must have a system that provides a reminder to parents of the presence of their 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.

Statement of Deona Bien RN, MSN in Executive Leadership, CLC (Certified Lactation Consultant), LNC (Legal Nurse Consultant), System Director of Women and Children Service Line for Trident Health, a subsidiary of Hospital Corporation of America (HCA)

June 7, 2017

In 2003 my family welcomed a very loved little girl named Aslyn Paige Tallulah Ryan. She was a beautiful blue eyed happy baby. She loved to sing and loved the ocean. She was the light of my life and the glue that made our blended family complete but little did we know that her journey in life would be so short.

In 2004, a few days after her first birthday I left for work at my new job as she was getting ready for drop off at the sitter's house. When I left she was tugging on her daddy's pant leg, too busy playing to stop for a kiss from mommy, with a book in hand wanting him to read before they left for the morning.

That would be the last time I heard my sweetheart singing or saw her beautiful smile.

It was a relatively mild temperature of 82 degrees in Hawaii and I was planning to leave work early that day. I left a message for the sitter to let her know I would be picking up Aslyn earlier than normal. About an hour later my husband called to tell me he was on the way to the sitter's house and that an ambulance had been called. I quickly rushed out the door and made my way to the hospital my daughter was being transported to.

I arrived at Kapiolani Hospital and was immediately taken to the Trauma Room where my daughter was. The only thing I heard were voices calling out her temperature at 106 and her oxygenation at 80%. To my nightmare the doctors were diligently trying to intubate her. As a medical professional, I knew the gravity of the situation and as a mother I was in absolute shock.

Aslyn suffered global brain damage from the effects of heatstroke and lack of oxygen to her brain because she was left for 50 minutes in a hot car. My beautiful baby struggled to survive for 3 days in a PICU where she had been given continuous blood transfusions and treatment but her little organs began to shut down. She died from the injuries she suffered when her sitter inadvertently forgot her in the car.

Many changes in our normal routine attributed to the events of that day. A new job, more days a week at the sitter's house and the sitter was driving a different car. Aslyn's seating position was directly behind the driver which caused Aslyn to be out of the line of sight in the car. These similar events happen to many people every day. These events account for the thousands of near misses and the average 37 deaths per year. Since 1990 there have been over 800 children that are gone due to hot car deaths. Families suffer a lifetime of heartache having lost a child in this way.

I wanted to change what happened to my child by helping others in whatever way that I could. In 2007, Governor Linda Lingle of Hawaii honored my daughter when she signed a new Hawaii law. This law would protect those who rescue children from cars and put educational components in place to educate drivers who are taking the drivers exam and those who rent cars in the state. Though education is an important factor, education is just a layer, and unfortunately it is a layer that many people don't feel they need to know. I can say that I felt the same way, but it DID happen to me as well as hundreds of other parents. Good and loving parents, even grandparents. As busy Americans, we need more than one layer of safety to protect the most innocent, priceless and precious cargo we carry in our vehicles. We need alerts and reminders as another layer of safety for protection. I believe that if there had been an alert in my sitter's car, my beautiful baby girl would be here today.

My daughter is now just a memory, lingering pain, a hole in my heart. I only have a headstone to hug. I now live my life, and what time I would have spent raising my daughter doing everything in my power to make sure that no one else suffers from this same pain and heartache. I reach out to comfort other families who have suffered this kind of loss. For no one could ever understand what we live through every single day. We now unite as grieving parents today 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.

Statement by Norman L. Collins, Sr., PhD
June 7, 2017

May 29, 2011 is a date that is etched in the chronicle of times in the hearts of me and my family.

It is the day when I received a phone call from a church friend who informed me that my son, Norman II, needed me to come to Clarksdale, Mississippi, right away because something had happened to my 3-month old grandson, Norman Collins III who was affectionately known as "Bishop." After several more frantic phone calls, I eventually received word that our dear Bishop was dead, the victim of heatstroke after being unknowingly left in his parents' hot car in a church parking lot on a 93-degree Sunday afternoon, due to a miscommunication. Grief-stricken, all I could remember was the pain in my heart not felt since I witnessed the death of my mother 10 years earlier. The daily horror I and my family encounter at the thought of Bishop being buckled in his car seat, crying relentlessly, sweating profusely, seizing uncontrollably and extending his little arms for help with no one to attend to him – at times it is simply too much to bear for any human.

As one would imagine, the days since Bishop's death have not been easy, but they've yielded several positives, including bringing to the forefront the need to build awareness and prevention of child safety in and around cars.

Yes, Bishop's death was tragic and unintentional. It was the result of confusion and misunderstanding between two people. But above all it was preventable.

I have thought so many times how effective and valuable prevention messages and methods would have been toward saving our dear Bishop and countless others, including the 9 children this year who have succumbed to child hot car deaths.

For this reason, 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.

We all have a God-given right, responsibility, and reason to protect our children as well as each other. Whereas we cannot change what happened to our precious boy Bishop and the over 800 children who died from heatstroke since 1990, as advocates, parents, teachers, rescuers, legislators and media, we must do something to help.

I challenge each person here today and around the United States to help us by working together and pledge to never stop talking, to never stop raising awareness and to never stop working to require technology in all vehicles to make hot car deaths a thing of the past. Thank you.

Statement of Miles Harrison

June 7, 2017

Almost 9 years ago it was a typical day of getting everyone up and ready to head out the door as well as get myself to work on time. Like so many parents, I was multi-tasking, getting my child ready, making sure we had everything packed and rushing around with the typical morning busyness.

My world changed forever that day.

When I went into my office that day, I was focused on fixing all the problems at work because that was my job. The day flew by. I went to lunch with my boss to fill him in on the status of the work (my only break of the day). Then, having no idea what time it was, a colleague came into my office and said, "Hey, do you have a doll in your car?" Stunned, I had no idea why he would ask such a question and couldn't imagine what he was talking about. I stood up and started to go through what I had done that day; and then realized, "OH MY GOD - NO- OH MY GOD- NO!" I rushed to the car and as I came upon the side window – I saw Chase... I had not dropped him off at daycare as I had intended to.

I ripped open the car door and pulled him from the car seat unaware of anyone around and ran into the office with him in my arms. SCREAMING and crying and calling out for help. It was too late.

I was so distraught, upset and completely incapacitated that I spent hours in the ER. The nurse offered me painkillers to help me feel better; but I refused and said "I did not deserve to not feel pain."

Without any compassion, the police demanded that I be brought to the station and interviewed. The detective started asking all sorts of questions like, "Did you have life insurance on your son?" It started to hit me, I had killed my son. I did it. My poor sweet little boy. God take me now and return him to his beautiful mother. PLEASE GOD NOT HIM. ME.

I had to be hospitalized for several weeks and even registered under a fake name because I would have been arrested the moment I left the hospital. Tragically, I was not even allowed to attend my son's funeral.

My story continues with a very public trial, fighting a charge of involuntary manslaughter of which, thank God, I was found not guilty after three days in the courtroom. It really did not matter to me whether I was found guilty or innocent. I considered myself guilty. Guilty and full of shame and anger.

I cry every day for Chase. I still have not forgiven myself and don't know if I have the capacity to do so. I look at my wife in amazement. She never wavered. She stayed with me and we are still together. She is the most beautiful and wonderful wife in the world.

After the trial, Gene Weingarten wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning article titled "Fatal Distraction" about parents who have gone through what my family went through. He somehow was able to capture the essence of how otherwise wonderful parents could be involved in a 'parent's worst nightmare.' He was able to explain this modern day phenomena in a way the people could understand and relate to.

The death of our precious baby boy became an international incident. The Russian government banned all adoptions of American children and named the law after our son, Chase. We were bombarded with news articles written about what a terrible person I am and how this could NEVER happen to responsible people. But frankly, the daily beating I give to myself is far more brutal than anything I have ever read about myself on the Internet.

This did not have to happen. If there had been a simple chime to alert me of my son's presence, none of this would have happened. How can this be, that in our great country it is not mandatory that the simplest alarm not be required in all cars? Children are dying unnecessarily. Families are being destroyed unnecessarily. This has got to stop. It is so important that we pass this bill being introduced today.

In our son Chase's honor, we have made it our mission to try and prevent this unspeakable tragedy from happening to ANY parents. 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? Every loving, caring parent must realize that this disaster could happen to them. They need to be made aware of this phenomena and 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.



Statement of Janette E Fennell, President and Founder, KidsAndCars.org

Every summer at KidsAndCar.org we brace ourselves for the rising toll of children that will die of heatstroke in hot vehicles. Since 1990 more than 800 children have died in hot cars. The suffering these 800 families endure is simply unimaginable. But, at the same time we know that solutions currently exist to prevent these deaths, making this loss of life even more tragic.

We live in an ever-changing world, and this bill is about utilizing and perfecting the resources we already have access to in order to save innocent lives.

Every day, week, month and year we work tirelessly to educate parents and caregivers about these dangers. Our efforts include our "Look Before You Lock" program, where more than 750,000 information safety cards have been distributed to birthing centers nationwide as well as public service announcements warning the public about these dangers.

But education is not enough when all it takes is a simple change in a daily routine to cause a parent to drive past their childcare center and unknowingly leave their child in their vehicle. Current state laws require putting your baby in a rear-facing child safety seat in the backseat, which has saved the lives of thousands of children in car crashes. But, as we learned from Dr. Diamond, there are unintended consequences of this shift to "out of sight," when our quiet little unobtrusive passengers can slip "out of mind." Laws requiring babies to travel in the back seat clearly put more responsibility on drivers, not less.

The auto industry has acknowledged that we are human and our memories often fail us because our vehicles are already filled with reminder systems. Today our cars are able to warn us if we leave our headlights on, our keys are in the ignition, our car door is open, if we are low on gas and if our seatbelt isn't buckled. But if a child is left behind, it's a matter of life and death. So if all of these reminder systems are possible; how can we allow children to continue to die in hot vehicles each and EVERY year?

Safety is something every family deserves. It shouldn't be an option. And it shouldn't be political. The federal government, our legislators, automakers along with safety advocates have the ability to solve this problem.

When we learn about the possibility of tainted peanut butter, store shelves are emptied immediately. Faulty kids' toys and bad hamburger is recalled without delay. Yet, we shamefully remain complacent about the children who continue to die for something so utterly preventable. For the sake of the children and their families, we must pass this bill into law. Car companies must step up to protect their most vulnerable passengers. It will take technology to prevent these unthinkable tragedies.

We know technology works. Today, technology saves your car battery. Tomorrow, it could save your child.