



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

SPEAKER BIOS
Press Conference to Release the
2019 Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws
Tuesday, January 22, 2019
Reserve Officers Association, Washington, D.C.

Catherine Chase: Cathy Chase is President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. Her career has been in the areas of transportation advocacy and policy, teenage violence prevention and support for at-risk youth, political fundraising and campaigning, and government relations. She has worked and volunteered for numerous nonprofit organizations in the Washington, DC area related to education, at-risk populations and legislative advocacy. Cathy is a graduate of Rutgers College and received her J.D. from the George Washington University Law School.

Janette Fennell: Janette Fennell is the Founder and President of KidsAndCars.org, a national nonprofit organization working to prevent child injury and death in or around motor vehicles. She began her injury prevention career after being locked in her car trunk with no means of escape. Since then, Fennell has led successful safety campaigns, including the addition of a glow-in-the-dark trunk release in all car trunks as standard equipment and requiring the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) to collect and report nontraffic data. Ms. Fennell also serves as the Consumer-Co-Chair of Advocates' Board.

Matt Gannon: Matt Gannon is the Head of Federal Affairs for Farmers Insurance. A financial services lobbyist of 15 years, he joined Farmers in 2013. Previously he lobbied for the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies and the American Financial Services Association. He began his career as a campaign fundraising director at the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) during the 2002 and 2004 election cycles. Gannon currently serves as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Gannon has an undergraduate degree from James Madison University and an MBA from Georgetown University. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia with his wife and twin daughters.

Colonel James J. Mendonca: Colonel James J. Mendonca is presently in his 29th year of service with the Central Falls Police Department (Rhode Island) having been appointed chief of police on January 10, 2013. Prior to his current post, Colonel Mendonca held a number of command level assignments to include supervising the Investigative and Administrative Divisions and serving as the Field Operations Commander. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in the Administration of Justice from Roger Williams University and a Master of Science in Criminal Justice with a Concentration in Homeland Security and Emergency Management from Excelsior College. Colonel Mendonca recently served as President of the Rhode Island Police Chiefs' Association.

Elda Ramirez, PhD, RN: Dr. Elda Ramirez is a Professor of Clinical Nursing at The University of Texas and has been a registered nurse since 1988. Her primary area of clinical practice has always been in emergency care. Elda is an experienced educator, researcher and clinician. She has dedicated her career to work collaboratively with emergency care providers and other disciplines to prepare nurses and nurse practitioners in the specialty of emergency care. Her educational and research foci have been dedicated to the safe, quality care of patients in the emergency and trauma care. She is also the Founder of the American Academy of Emergency Nurse Practitioners, a member of the Emergency Nurses Association, and a Fellow of the Academy of Emergency Nursing.

Helen Witty: Helen Witty joined MADD in 2001, less than a year after her 16-year-old daughter, Helen Marie, was killed by a drunk and drugged teen driver while rollerblading on a designated bike path near the family's Miami home. Before becoming National President in 2019, Helen spent 11 years as a MADD volunteer victim advocate and seven years as a staff member facilitating MADD's prevention programs in South Florida. As MADD's national spokesperson, Helen speaks to lawmakers around the nation about the importance of drunk driving laws, including ignition interlocks for all offenders. She also continues to share Helen Marie's story, believing it is what her daughter would have wanted. A native of Miami, she lives in the childhood home her father built, with her beloved husband, John. They have a surviving son, John Jr.