

STATEMENT OF
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Press Conference on Legislation to Require Passive Alcohol Detection Systems
in New Cars, the “RIDE” Act
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Good afternoon. I am Joan Claybrook, President Emeritus of Public Citizen, former Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and a Board Member of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. I am delighted to speak today in support of bipartisan legislation, the Reduce Impaired Driving for Everyone, or “RIDE,” Act, sponsored by Senators Tom Udall (D-NM) and Rick Scott (R-FL). This bill addresses the urgent need to curb drunk driving through the use of passive alcohol detection systems. I commend Senators Udall and Scott for their leadership on this critical public health and safety issue.

Impaired driving crashes cause a major emotional and financial toll including the preventable and premature deaths of children, parents, friends, and breadwinners within families. In 2017 alone, nearly 11,000 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes involving drivers with a blood alcohol concentration, also known as BAC, of .08% or higher, .08% being the legal limit in most states. Additionally, the total comprehensive costs of drunk driving in this country amount to more than \$200 billion annually. Families who have been forced to cope with these tragedies know that the pain and suffering they cause never goes away. It is abundantly clear that more must be done to get passive alcohol detection technology into new vehicles as soon as possible. That is why Congress must take swift action on the RIDE Act to finally stop this public health epidemic.

Over the last decade, the federal government and automakers have been working to develop a passive alcohol detection system known as DADSS (Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety), spending tens of millions of federal dollars on the effort. That may sound impressive, but when compared to the billions of dollars the industry has spent and continues to spend on developing driverless cars, it is a prime example of “slow walking” a technological vaccine that could virtually eradicate impaired driving.

According to numerous news reports, in recent years companies like Volvo, Nissan and Jaguar also have undertaken research and testing aimed at detecting impairment and other dangerous behaviors. But many of these projects exist in only preliminary form. The RIDE Act will inspire innovation and will create a market for this technology for suppliers and auto makers, ultimately getting the technology across the finish line.

Finally, I want to close by noting that there is a lot of anger in this country toward the alcohol industry because people who don’t drink and drive are being needlessly killed by those who do. Members of the alcohol industry have supported the use of ignition interlock devices, or IIDs, after a person is convicted of impaired driving. The concept of passive alcohol detection systems is similar, in that it prevents someone who is impaired from driving. Considering that the average first offender will have driven drunk 87 times before being arrested, it makes sense to get in front of the issue with a preventative measure. For these reasons, I urge the alcoholic beverage industry to consider a course correction and get behind this lifesaving legislation. The RIDE Act is not anti-drinking; it’s anti-drinking and driving. Keeping customers alive is good for business, and more importantly, it’s the right thing to do.

I want to once again thank Senators Udall and Scott for their leadership. We look forward to working with them, MADD, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety and others to accelerate the drive toward a future with zero drunk driving deaths.