

December 9, 2020

The Honorable Deb Fischer, Chairman  
The Honorable Tammy Duckworth, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Transportation and Safety  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Fischer and Ranking Member Duckworth:

Thank you for your leadership in holding tomorrow's hearing, "The Logistics of Transporting a COVID-19 Vaccine." We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

While our Nation continues to suffer the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic, we are grateful for your attention to this vital part of the relief effort. As leaders of organizations with public health and safety missions, we appreciate the goal of ensuring that vaccines expeditiously reach the public. It is also imperative that safety on our roads remains a key priority. The objectives of transporting vaccines efficiently and safely must not be mutually exclusive.

Fatalities in large truck-involved crashes have risen dramatically. According to 2019 estimates by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), crashes involving large trucks killed more than 5,000 people -- a staggering 48 percent increase since a low in 2009. Additionally, the latest data available from DOT show that in 2018, 151,000 people were injured in crashes involving a large truck and the cost to society from commercial motor vehicle (CMV) crashes in 2018 was estimated to be \$143 billion. Although we are not living in ordinary times, these facts provide compelling reasons to prioritize truck safety improvements and most certainly not to erode current safety protections.

In 2018, of the nearly 5,000 people killed in large truck crashes, almost 900 were occupants of CMVs. In fact, driving a truck is one of the most dangerous professions in the U.S., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The heroic efforts of truck drivers during this crisis are commendable, and they deserve a safer "work environment" in which to conduct their essential work.

Unfortunately, numerous lifesaving truck safety advances have lagged for years, including requirements for automatic emergency braking systems, speed limiters, effective underride guards, adequate driver training, and obstructive sleep apnea screening and treatment. Failure to take action by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration have needlessly imperiled the safety of all road users – truck drivers and motorists. We commend Ranking Member Duckworth for sponsoring the Protecting Roadside First Responders Act (S. 2700) and urge the Subcommittee to move this legislation as well as support other measures requiring the DOT to move forward with these essential safety

improvements, many of which already are required in other countries and most of which have been recommended repeatedly by the National Transportation Safety Board.

We understand that exemptions to truck safety rules and protections may be requested in the coming months in response to the public health emergency. However, these exemptions must be narrowly tailored in time and scope with appropriate safeguards to protect not only the drivers themselves, but all road users. Additionally, we strongly oppose enshrining them in statute considering their temporary nature.

Any potential negative consequences to public safety must be minimized by ensuring exemptions: 1) are limited to the duration of the national emergency declaration; 2) are not overly broad but instead are constructed in a way that clearly delineates goods and services that are essential for direct pandemic response; and, 3) include precise language that these exemptions cannot be used to justify any future rollback or repeal of truck safety rules.

The safety of truck drivers as they provide continued movement of vaccines and essential freight and those on the roads with them, including families, law enforcement, first responders and construction crews, must be paramount. Thank you again for holding this relevant hearing.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety  
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways  
Consumer Federation of America  
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety  
KidsAndCars.org  
National Consumers League  
Parents Against Tired Truckers  
Public Citizen  
Trauma Foundation  
Truck Safety Coalition

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee