

April 14, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Price
Chairman, Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairman Price and Ranking Members Granger and Diaz-Balart:

Thank you for holding tomorrow's important hearing to consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). As leaders of organizations committed to preventing motor vehicle crashes, saving lives, reducing injuries and containing costs, we write to express our strong support of a robust budget for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA, "Agency"). Adequate funding for the Agency is critical, especially in light of the persistently high and increasing number of crash deaths and injuries. We respectfully ask that this letter be included in the hearing record.

In 2019, 36,096 people were killed and over 2.7 million more were injured. Last year, despite our Nation's roadways being emptier due to the impacts of COVID-19, risky driving behaviors such as speeding, impairment, distraction and lack of seat belt use all spiked. This tragic trend was experienced across the country and preliminary estimates from NHTSA indicate that the fatality rate and total for the first nine months of 2020 increased over the same time period in 2019.

The spiraling cost of motor vehicle crashes is a massive and unnecessary drain on our nation's economy, businesses and residents. Based on 2010 NHTSA data, the overall annual societal cost of crashes exceeds \$800 billion, including \$242 billion in direct economic costs. When adjusted only for inflation, comprehensive crash costs now near one trillion dollars, with direct economic costs amounting to \$292 billion. This is equivalent to an \$885 "crash tax" on every U.S. resident. Moreover, in 2018 alone, motor vehicle crashes cost employers \$72.2 billion.

Despite the fact that 95 percent of transportation-related fatalities involve motor vehicles, NHTSA historically receives only one percent of the overall U.S. DOT budget. In the past 50 years, federal spending on lifesaving and cost-effective vehicle safety programs has declined based on inflation while the death toll continues to mount, and NHTSA's program responsibilities have experienced a major expansion. We urge you to significantly enhance NHTSA's vehicle safety budget to accomplish safety for all road users and achieve safety equity.

For Over 50 Years NHTSA’s Vehicle Safety Budget Shrinks While Program Needs Escalate: Comparison of NHTSA’s Safety Budget 1977 vs. 2020

Account	Appropriations (millions)			Change in Spending Power	Percent Change
	1977	1977 (\$2021)	2020		
Vehicle Safety	\$72	\$322	\$194	-\$128	-40%
State & Community Grants	\$89	\$398	\$724	+\$326	+82%

Count (millions)	1977	2019	Change in Count	Percent Change
Licensed Drivers	138	229	+91	+66%
Vehicle Registrations	135	276	+141	+104%

Additionally, NHTSA is facing new and greater challenges that it must be equipped to address. Vehicles with automated driving capabilities are being developed and deployed, and NHTSA needs to develop regulations to ensure the safety of this new technology. Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards administered by NHTSA are responsible for saving at least 600,000 lives between 1960 and 2012. Unfortunately, there have already been several fatalities in crashes involving vehicles operating with these systems which have been investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) leading to recommendations to NHTSA to adopt minimum performance requirements. In March 2018, the NTSB’s findings noted that the approach of NHTSA “to the oversight of automated vehicles is misguided, because it essentially relies on waiting for problems to occur rather than addressing safety issues proactively.”¹ The Agency’s budget is grossly insufficient given the multitude of new responsibilities and duties it will necessarily have as AVs are deployed in mass. It must be given additional funding and staff, including those with the required expertise, to ensure the safety of all road users.

The NHTSA budget also supports numerous initiatives including preventing distracted driving, enhancing occupant protection, advancing safety for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists, improving safety for novice and older drivers, and curbing impaired driving. Additionally, maintaining adequate funding for the Operations and Research (O&R) budget, which is responsible for important data collection and consumer information on vehicle safety defects, is critical. The high number of deaths and injuries brings a renewed urgency to Section 402 Highway Safety and Section 405 National Priority Safety Programs.

Financial and staff resources are crucial to bringing down motor vehicle crash deaths. As you consider FY 2022 appropriations for U.S. DOT and its agencies, we respectfully request that increase the current funding level for NHTSA and ensure it prioritizes safety for all roadway

¹ NTSB, Collision Between a Sport Utility Vehicle Operating With Partial Driving Automation and a Crash Attenuator Mountain View, California, March 23, 2018, Accident Report NTSB/HAR-20/01 (Feb. 25, 2020).

users to curtail roadway deaths and injuries.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Joan Claybrook, Chair
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways and
Former Administrator, NHTSA

Jack Gillis, Executive Director
Consumer Federation of America

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
Trauma Foundation

Daphne Izer
Russ Swift
Co-Founders
Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.)

Lorraine M. Martin, President and CEO
National Safety Council

Jason Levine, Executive Director
Center for Auto Safety

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
KidsAndCars.org

Dawn King, President
Truck Safety Coalition (TSC)

cc: Members of the Committee on Appropriations