



Good afternoon, I'm Jason Levine, Executive Director of the Center for Auto Safety. Since 1970, the Center has fought for improved auto safety, quality, and fuel economy on behalf of all drivers, passengers, and pedestrians.

Today, we are here to talk about vehicle safety and the [Surface Transportation Investment Act](#) (STIA). The STIA was introduced at a moment when car crash deaths are on the rise with more than 100 Americans killed every day either in a vehicle or when they are hit by one. At the same time, amazing safety technology exists to help prevent a momentary mistake from becoming a permanent tragedy. We need to get that technology into cars – quickly.

The STIA deserves recognition because it is good to see the Senate formally acknowledge that car crash deaths in the U.S. are a problem, and admitting a problem is the first step on the road to solving it.

However, just saying the words is only the first step on a long journey. Too often, unfortunately, the STIA chooses words over action.

Fortunately, in at least one instance, the STIA does recognize the potential for improved technology and new standards to play an important role in safety. The bill requires a final rule be written by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) within three years of passage, employing advanced technology to address the more than 10,000 deaths every year associated with impaired driving. Unfortunately, with respect to almost all other vehicle safety issues, the STIA falls short.

Requiring reports is not the same as requiring rules.

Mandating studies is not the same as mandating performance standards.

Just using the word “recall” 31 times does not actually end the sale of dangerous used cars with unrepaired recalls, like faulty ignition switches, bad breaks, or defective airbags.

To achieve the safety benefits of crash avoidance technology, performance standards with deadlines are necessary. Driver monitoring systems that can tackle distracted and automation complacent driving must be prioritized and accelerated, not relegated exclusively to the realm of research. As these types of technologies have become commonplace in the EU, it is not a coincidence their car crash death rate has fallen dramatically even as ours has risen.

One section of the STIA appears to address the need to modernize a seat back safety standard that was written during the administration of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Yet, upon further inspection, the STIA fails to require any update at all to a standard that has been repeatedly proven to be inadequate.

Fifty-four years of a performance standard pretending a lawn chair is safe enough to be protective in a rear crash has meant five decades of catastrophic suffering. In 2019, career staff at NHTSA published research with potential solutions that would cost less than \$5 per seat. Senators Markey and Blumenthal introduced a bill requiring a final rule to address seatback failures killing and maiming children and adults. STIA removed that requirement leaving seatback safety in the sixties.

The U.S. created the 5-star crash rating system to drive vehicle innovation and safety using market-based incentives. Yet, NCAP now trails the world because it has not been updated in over a decade, and STIA does not guarantee such an update will happen any time soon. Thus, for the foreseeable future, U.S. car consumers will continue to see top-ratings given out like gold stars in pre-school – everyone gets one.

The STIA could improve vehicle safety in America for a generation. We hope the Senate improves the bill in order to travel that path.

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The Center for Auto Safety was founded in 1970 in Washington, DC as a member supported, national, independent, non-profit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to improving vehicle safety, quality, and fuel economy for all drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Over the last 51 years, the Center has successfully led the fight for lemon laws in every state, airbags in every vehicle, and recall repairs being made at no cost to the consumer. For 40 years the Center published *The Car Book*, America's most comprehensive car buying guide focused on safety, and in that spirit now offers the custom [Vehicle Safety Check](#) providing regular safety updates and hard-to-find service alerts on vehicle safety issues. To learn more about the Center, please visit www.AutoSafety.org.