



STATEMENT OF
Dr. Deanna Wathington, MD, MPH, FAAFP
at Press Conference to Ensure Safety is Advanced in
Any Transportation/Infrastructure Package
July 20, 2021

Good morning. I am Dr. Deanna Wathington, Executive Board Chair of the American Public Health Association.

Every day doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals witness the devastation of motor vehicle crashes. We see peoples' legs crushed, arms mangled, and internal organs damaged sometimes beyond repair. While we tend to these injuries, we simultaneously know that many of them could have been prevented.

By taking action now, Congress can save tens of thousands of lives. For example:

- **Automatic emergency braking, or "AEB,"** is today's safety gamechanger to address all types of dangers on our roads. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that equipping all cars, pickup trucks, vans, minivans, and SUVs with AEB could prevent 1.9 million crashes, nearly 900,000 injuries, and more than 4,700 deaths annually.
- **Passive impaired driving prevention technology** could save more than 9,400 lives per year once in widespread use, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.
- **Distracted driving** crashes contributed to more than 3,100 fatalities in 2019. These crashes, which are known to be underreported, could be mitigated by **driver monitoring technology**. In addition to curbing other leading crash causes such as impaired and drowsy driving, these systems will reduce automation complacency, an emergent issue as automated driving technology becomes more common and assumes more of the driving task.
- Since 1990, more than 1,000 children have perished in **hot car deaths**, an average of 39 per year. The latest victim was a two-year old girl last Friday in my home state of Florida. Tragically these deaths continue to occur although **detection and alert technology** to prevent them is available and affordable.
- **Pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities** remain at a 30-year high, with more than 6,200 pedestrians and nearly 850 bicyclists killed on our roads in 2020. The majority of these fatalities happen when it is dark out and outside of crosswalks. **Upgrading the headlamp standard** to improve performance and visibility and decrease glare, and setting a standard for adaptive headlamps are vitally needed.

If all new vehicles were equipped with these improvements – as is required in the INVEST in America Act - more 70,000 lives could be saved over the five-year span of this legislation – and this is a very conservative estimate. I urge the Senate to do the right thing at this pivotal juncture and include the safety provisions passed by the House.

As medical providers, we never withhold a proven cure from a sick patient. It is unacceptable for the Senate to provide placebos instead of proven remedies to save lives and spare injuries.