

**STATEMENT OF
Joan Claybrook
Chair, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways
Former Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
at Press Conference to Ensure Safety is Advanced in
Any Transportation/Infrastructure Package
July 20, 2021**

Good morning. I am Joan Claybrook, Chair of the Board for Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways, known as CRASH, and former Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration appointed by President Jimmy Carter. I am honored to join House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce Chairwoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), who are both exemplary safety champions, as well as the families whose loved ones suffered serious injuries or were killed, and other esteemed stakeholders.

We are at a critical time in our nation's history for transportation safety. Motor vehicle crash deaths are on the rise, exceeding 38,000 people being killed last year. Yet, terrific, dynamic technologies, like automatic emergency braking known as AEB, that would save thousands of lives are available and on the market now in some vehicles. The problem is federal safety standards don't require them in new cars and trucks. Without such a requirement, three things happen: 1. There's no assurance these systems will perform effectively. So some systems may perform well, while other systems may be substandard or even dangerous. 2. Motor vehicle companies can upcharge for these systems – making them unaffordable to many families and smaller companies. 3. Some companies won't put the systems in their vehicles at all.

In this infrastructure bill, there's a giant loophole. Special trucking interests lobbied for a carve-out for small and medium size trucks from the AEB requirement in the House and Senate bills which addresses large trucks and passenger cars. However, 27 percent of all fatalities in large truck crashes involved these vehicles and they have been on the rise every year from 2016 to 2019. This means the trucks delivering packages and goods in our neighborhoods where children are playing and people are walking, rolling in wheelchairs or biking won't have AEB. It's a recipe for disaster.

AEB is the most effective and significant new safety technology in decades. It automatically slows or stops vehicles about to crash. It is also a big solution for the long-standing and challenging problems of drunk, drugged, drowsy and distracted driving.

With a price tag of only \$290 for medium size trucks, Congress can and must include this cost-effective improvement in this infrastructure bill. We are calling on our House and Senate champions to make this happen in this legislation. Without this requirement, hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries will occur.

Legislative requirements are how airbags and electronic stability control which prevents rollovers became standard equipment in new cars in the 1990s and early 2000s. The result is that tens of thousands of lives have been saved. It is time for the next generation of vehicle safety technology to be required as standard equipment in all new vehicles.

The U.S. Department of Transportation places the value of a life at \$11.6 million. Comparatively, the costs of requiring proven technologies in new vehicles is minor.

Like AEB, the cost for passive impaired driving prevention technology is estimated to be in the range of a few hundred dollars, and it could save more than 9,400 lives each year.

The expense of technology to detect and alert when children are knowingly or unintentionally left alone in a vehicle, or access it on their own, is negligible, and it is negligent that this technology is not yet a standard feature in all new cars. We must end heartbreaking “hot cars” deaths of children.

The majority of crashes with pedestrians and bicyclists occur at night and outside of crosswalks, yet the headlight standard hasn't been upgraded since 1997, and we're still waiting on the rulemaking for adaptive headlamps. Improved headlamps that result in better visibility and less glare have an insignificant price tag but significant potential.

Upgrading the seat back standard could cost as little as one dollar, yet it hasn't been done in over 50 years while preventable seat back failure tragedies continue to occur with parents in the front seat falling backward and killing their own children in a rear-end crash.

The problems with keyless ignitions causing carbon monoxide poisoning and vehicle rollaways could be fixed for pennies.

Additionally, anti-truck safety provisions in the current Senate bill that permit teen truck drivers to operate big rigs in interstate commerce, exempt drivers hauling livestock from complying with hours of service limits, and allow bigger or heavier trucks to operate on our roads must be stricken.

The costs for safety fixes are low but the stakes not to require them are very high. We urge Congress to do its job and pass a bill that protects all road users and ends the needless suffering caused by preventable crashes. None of this is rocket science or will break the bank. It's time to act now.

Thank you.