



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

**STATEMENT OF
Cathy Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
at Press Conference Calling on the U.S. Department of Transportation
to Advance the Child Protection “Hot Cars” Mandate
in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
April 28, 2022**

Good morning. I’m Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. Advocates is an alliance of consumer, medical, public health, law enforcement, and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to improve road safety for all.

I’d first like to thank Janette Fennell and Kids and Car Safety for their leadership to prevent hot car deaths and injuries. Advocates is proud to partner with them and other stakeholders to advance solutions to this tragic vehicle safety problem. I would also like to thank Dikeisha Whitlock-Pryer for participating today and all of the many families who have shared their unthinkable, tragic losses over the years to call attention to the urgent need for action.

Safety technology that detects and alerts to the presence of unattended children must be required as standard equipment on all new passenger vehicles. In November of last year, a key step toward achieving this end was included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ((IIJA), Pub. L. 117-58). Representatives Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) as well as Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) have been longtime champions of this issue and made certain it was included in this bigger transportation bill. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Senate Commerce Committee Chair Maria Cantwell (D-WA), among others, also must be commended for this end result.

The law directs the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue a rule by November 2023 requiring a backseat alert system; however, it doesn’t compel a detection system and it won’t protect children who independently enter a car and get trapped in the front seat area – both of which are essential requirements. This is why we have been calling for the U.S. DOT to view the provision as a “floor,” and not a “ceiling,” for what must be achieved. The U.S. DOT has the authority to exceed the Congressional mandate. Absent requiring that new cars be equipped with a system to detect occupants in the whole passenger compartment, children will continue to be imperiled and families will be left with a false sense of security.

Before I conclude, I just want to point out a stark comparison of auto industry priorities. While they have spent billions of dollars in the race to develop and produce autonomous vehicles (AVs), a technology with unproven safety benefits, the industry, with limited exceptions, has not put a relatively simple, inexpensive, and already available lifesaving technology into new cars.

We are holding this event today because Sunday, May 1 is National Heatstroke Prevention Day. While this day is important for calling attention to this public health problem, the day will come and go, and awareness alone does not offer a comprehensive solution. With more than 1,000 children having died in hot car incidents since 1990, we cannot afford to delay or dilute this lifesaving measure.