

May 2, 2022

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair  
The Honorable Roger Wicker, Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker:

Thank you for holding tomorrow's important hearing to consider the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Priorities. Our organizations are committed to eliminating the preventable physical, emotional, and economic toll of motor vehicle crashes. Adequate resources, including funds and staff, for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA, "Agency") are vital to achieving this goal. We respectfully ask that this letter be included in the hearing record.

Our nation's roads have become more dangerous and deadly. In 2020, 38,824 people were killed – the highest annual total in more than a decade. Increased impairment, speeding, and lack of seat belt use contributed to this spike. Data for the first nine months of 2021 disclosed the horrific rise in traffic fatalities continued, with a 12 percent upsurge over the same period in 2020. This increase during the first nine months represents the highest percentage jump in the recorded history of data in the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). Additionally, in 2020, nearly 5,000 people were killed in crashes involving a large truck. Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck crashes has increased by 45 percent.

Highway crashes impose a tremendous cost burden on society estimated to exceed one trillion dollars annually. Sufficient funding and resources for NHTSA can be the catalyst for implementing effective safety countermeasures to prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs.

Over the past four decades, the funding for NHTSA's lifesaving mission has fallen woefully short because of increased costs and statutory responsibilities. While 95 percent of transportation-related fatalities involve motor vehicles, NHTSA historically receives only one percent of the overall U.S. DOT budget. Despite the mounting death and injury toll, increasingly complex vehicle technology and related issues, persistently high numbers of vehicle safety recalls, overdue motor vehicle and motor carrier safety rules mandated by Congress, and more requirements, the NHTSA's actual spending for vehicle safety programs has dramatically declined based on inflation, as illustrated by the chart below.

**For Over 40 Years NHTSA’s Vehicle Safety Budget Shrinks While Program Needs Escalate:  
Comparison of NHTSA’s Safety Budget 1977 vs. 2022**

Account	Appropriations (millions)			Change in Spending Power	Percent Change
	1977	1977 (\$2022)	2022		
<b>Vehicle Safety</b>	<b>\$72</b>	<b>\$346</b>	<b>\$200</b>	<b>-\$146</b>	<b>-42%</b>
<b>State &amp; Community Grants</b>	<b>\$89</b>	<b>\$428</b>	<b>\$736</b>	<b>\$308</b>	<b>+72%</b>

Count (millions)	1977	2020	Change in Count	Percent Change
<b>Licensed Drivers</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>+90</b>	<b>+65%</b>
<b>Vehicle Registrations</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>+134</b>	<b>+94%</b>

We were pleased that the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Pub. L. 117-103) fully funded the safety improvements in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58). Further, we are encouraged by the Administration’s FY 2023 budget proposal for the U.S. DOT which provides a six percent overall increase. The boost for NHTSA will help to address the shortfall in spending power detailed in the chart above and serve as a good “down payment” on the Agency’s work related to vehicle safety and highway safety research which has a high payoff.

The IIJA directed NHTSA to undertake a number of actions to advance safety including establishing performance standards for critical vehicle safety technology. Moreover, the Agency is responsible for a range of initiatives aimed at reducing risky driving decisions such as speeding, distracted, drunk, drugged, and drowsy driving, improving occupant protection, and bolstering the safety of vulnerable road users, among others. The Section 402 Highway Safety Program and Section 405 National Priority Safety Program, in combination with state adoption of essential traffic safety laws, can assist these ongoing efforts. Additionally, the Agency’s Operations and Research (O&R) budget is critical to important activities related to data collection, consumer information, and identification of vehicle safety defects. All these safety objectives can be realized if buttressed by an adequately funded budget.

It is estimated that Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards administered by NHTSA are responsible for saving at least 600,000 lives between 1960 and 2012. Our nation is at a transformative time in transportation with the rapid development and deployment of lifesaving vehicle safety technologies. The issuance of standards, as mandated by Congress in the IIJA for proven vehicle safety technology including advanced driver assistance systems like automatic emergency braking and advanced impaired driving prevention technology, will be game-changing. It is also incumbent upon NHTSA to exert leadership and strong oversight as vehicles are equipped with automated driving features, including the issuance of safety standards for the technologies and systems that are responsible for the driving task and to ensure data transparency. This will protect the public and minimize potential safety risks. The Agency’s ability to effectively achieve this task will be severely hampered without additional funding and resources, including for hiring staff with necessary expertise.

The skyrocketing number of fatalities on our roadways demands urgent action. This Committee plays a critical role in our efforts to curb highways deaths and injuries. Adequate funding and staff resources

for the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies are essential to ensure the timely implementation of the safety requirements of the IIJA, to reverse the recent upward trend in roadway fatalities, and to meet the moment with proven and cost-effective solutions to prevent crashes and save lives.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President  
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Jill Ingrassia, Executive Director  
AAA Advocacy & Communications

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, Executive Director  
American Public Health Association

Michael Brooks, Acting Executive Director  
Center for Auto Safety

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

Jack Gillis, Executive Director  
Consumer Federation of America

Rosemary Shahan, President  
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Amy Cohen, Co-Founder  
Families for Safe Streets

Janette Fennell, Founder and President  
Kids and Car Safety

Stephanie Manning, Chief Government Affairs  
Officer  
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

Sally Greenberg, Executive Director  
National Consumers League

Lorraine Martin, President & CEO  
National Safety Council

Daphne and Steve Izer, Founders & Co-Chairs  
Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.)

Russell Swift, Co-Chair  
Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.) and  
Board Member, Truck Safety Coalition

Torine Creppy, President  
Safe Kids Worldwide

Stephen Hargarten, MD, MPH, Founding  
President  
Society for the Advancement of Violence and  
Injury Research

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director  
Trauma Foundation

Dawn King, President  
Truck Safety Coalition and  
Board Member, Citizens for Reliable and Safe  
Highways

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation