

March 22, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins, Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz, Chair
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Schatz, and Ranking Member Hyde-Smith:

Thank you for holding tomorrow's important hearing to consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Budget for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). 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 are dangerous and deadly. According to the NHTSA, 38,824 people were killed and an estimated 2.28 million more were injured in traffic crashes in 2020.ⁱ In 2021, the NHTSA estimates that 42,915 people were killed in traffic crashes and that these numbers remained relatively static in the first nine months of 2022.ⁱⁱ Additionally, in 2021, over 5,600 people were killed in crashes involving a large truck.ⁱⁱⁱ Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck crashes has increased by 66 percent.^{iv} Additionally, nearly 147,000 people were injured in crashes involving a large truck in 2020.^v New data finds that in the first six months of 2022, traffic fatalities in crashes involving at least one large truck are up 10 percent; 2,811 people were killed.^{vi}

Roadway crashes also impose a tremendous cost burden on society. In 2019, crashes, injuries, and fatalities imposed a financial burden of nearly \$1.4 trillion in total costs to society -- \$340 billion of which are direct economic costs, equivalent to a "crash tax" of \$1,035 on every American.^{vii} In 2018, crashes alone cost employers \$72.2 billion.^{viii} When adjusted solely for inflation, the amount is more than \$87 billion in 2023. 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.

For more than 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 following chart.

**For Over 40 Years NHTSA’s Vehicle Safety Budget Shrinks While Program Needs Escalate:
Comparison of NHTSA’s Safety Budget 1977 vs. 2023**

Account	Appropriations (millions)			Change in Spending Power	Percent Change
	1977	1977 (\$2023)	2023		
Vehicle Safety	\$72	\$394	\$210	-\$184	-47%
State & Community Grants	\$89	\$455	\$756	\$301	+66%

Count (millions)	1977	2021	Change in Count	Percent Change
Licensed Drivers	138	233	+95	+69%
Vehicle Registrations	142	282	+147	+109%

We were pleased that the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Pub. L. 117-328) 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 2024 budget proposal for the U.S. DOT which provides a \$116 million increase in funding for NHTSA. This significant boost will help the Agency 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 rulemaking, enforcement and research and analysis which has a high payoff.

Sixteen months after enactment of the IIJA which directed NHTSA to undertake a number of actions to advance safety including establishing performance standards for critical vehicle safety technology, a majority of the directives for performance standards are overdue or unfulfilled. 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 and should be realized 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.^{ix} 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 (ADAS) 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 as well as cybersecurity, and to ensure data transparency. This will protect the public and minimize potential safety risks. The Agency’s ability to effectively achieve this task must be bolstered by additional funding and resources, including for hiring staff with necessary expertise.

The prevailing high number of fatalities on our roadways demands urgent action. This Committee plays a critical role in our efforts to curb highway deaths and injuries. Providing adequate funding and staff resources to the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies is an essential action to ensure implementation of the safety requirements of the IIJA is timely, to meaningfully reverse the upward trajectory in roadway fatalities for all road users, and to rise to the urgent need to advance 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, Executive Director
Center for Auto Safety

Joan Claybrook, Chair
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways and
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Jack Gillis
Consumer Federation of America

Rosemary Shahan, President
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
Kids and Car Safety

Stephanie Manning, Chief Government Affairs
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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
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Torine Creppy, President
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Stephen Hargarten, MD, MPH, Founding
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Injury Research

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
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Tami Friedrich, President
Truck Safety Coalition and Board Member,
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

ⁱ Traffic Safety Facts 2020, A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data, DOT HS 813 375, NHTSA (Oct. 2022).

ⁱⁱ Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities And Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2021, NHTSA, May 2022, DOT HS 813 298; and Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories Through June 2022, NHTSA, Dec. 2022, DOT HS 813 405

ⁱⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats; Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2021, NHTSA, May 2022, DOT HS 813 298.

^{iv} *Id.* and Traffic Safety Facts 2019: A Compilations of Motor Vehicle Crash Data, NHTSA, Aug. 2021, DOT HS 813 141. Note, the 66 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2021. However, between 2015 and 2016 there was a change in data collection at U.S. DOT that could affect this calculation. From 2009 to 2015 the number of fatalities in truck involved crashes increased by 21 percent and between 2016 to 2021, it increased by 20 percent.

^v Traffic Safety Facts, 2020 Data: Large Trucks, NHTSA, Apr. 2022, DOT HS 813 286.

^{vi} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, December). *Early estimates of motor vehicle traffic fatalities and fatality rate by sub-categories through June 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary, Report No. DOT HS 813 405). NHTSA.

^{vii} The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Dec. 2022, DOT HS 813 403.

^{viii} Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019, Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, March 2021.

^{ix} Lives Saved by Vehicle Safety Technologies and Associated Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, 1960 to 2012, DOT HS 812 069 (NHTSA, 2015); See also, NHTSA AV Policy, Executive Summary, p. 5 endnote 1.