May 14, 2025

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

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

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

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Thank you for holding tomorrow's important hearing to consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Budget for the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT). Our organizations are committed to eliminating the preventable physical, emotional and economic toll of motor vehicle crashes. Ensuring adequate resources for the U.S. DOT and its agencies, including funds and staff for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA, "Agency"), are vital to accomplish this safety priority.

On average, 112 people were killed every day on roads in the U.S., totaling just over 40,901 fatalities in 2023, the most recent final annual data from the NHTSA.[i] This is a 24 percent increase in deaths in just a decade.[ii] An additional 2.44 million people were injured.[iii] Early estimates for 2024 find a welcome reduction in traffic fatalities to 39,345.[iv] Yet, nearly 40,000 people killed on our roads is still reason for significant investments in solutions and the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies.

In 2023, 7,243 pedestrians and 1,154 pedalcyclists were killed in traffic crashes.[v] Motorcycles continue to be the most hazardous form of motor vehicle transportation;[vi] 6,302 riders were killed in 2023.[vii] That year, 5,439 people were killed and 41,733 were injured in large truck crashes.[viii] Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck crashes has increased by 76 percent.[ix] In that same timespan, the number of people injured in crashes involving large trucks rose by 117 percent.[x]

With regard to the leading contributing factors to motor vehicle crashes in 2023: alcohol impaired driving resulted in 12,429 people killed;[xi] speeding resulted in 11,775 people killed;[xii] 10,484 vehicle occupants killed in crashes were unrestrained;[xiii] and, crashes in which at least one driver was distracted resulted in 3,275 fatalities.[xiv] This deadly road epidemic is predicated on dangerous roadway design.[xv] Additionally, in 2021, the most recent year for which data is available according to the Non-Traffic Surveillance (NTS) system, an estimated 3,990 people were killed in non-traffic motor vehicle crashes, an increase of 26 percent from 2020.[xvi] And, since 1990, at least 1,127 children have died in hot cars.[xvii] These issues are persistent, and the solutions are known and available, yet remain underused, underfunded or are not required as standard equipment in vehicles.

In addition to the physical and emotional repercussions of motor vehicle crashes, the annual economic cost is approximately $340 billion (2019 dollars).[xviii] This figure equates to every person living in the U.S. essentially paying an annual "crash tax" of over $1,000. Moreover, the total value of societal harm from motor vehicle crashes in 2019, which includes loss of life, pain and decreased quality of life, was nearly $1.4 trillion.[xix] When adjusted solely for inflation, this figure amounts to over $1.72 trillion.[xx] Research from the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) finds motor vehicle crashes cost employers $72.2 billion in direct crash-related expenses in 2019.[xxi]

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. Vehicle safety upgrades remain a key component of a comprehensive and effective approach to improving traffic safety. The issuance of vehicle safety standards and requirements for technology and systems are proven to prevent crash fatalities and curb costs.

While traffic fatalities continue to be a public health crisis, the funding for NHTSA's lifesaving mission has fallen woefully short for more than four decades as costs and statutory responsibilities have increased. While 96 percent of transportation-related fatalities involve motor vehicles, NHTSA historically receives only one percent of the overall U.S. DOT budget.[xxii] Despite persistently high crash deaths and injuries, increasingly complex vehicle technology and related issues, consistently 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. 2024[xxiii, xxiv]

Account	Appropriations (millions)			Change in Spending Power	Percent Change
	1977	1977 ($2024)	2024		
Vehicle Safety	$72	$380	$110	-$270	-71%
State & Community Grants	$89	$469	$795	$326	70%

The above table clearly demonstrates the disparity in funding for vehicle safety which should be increased at a rate commensurate with State and Community Grant funding.

Count (millions)	1977	2022	Change in Count	Percent Change
Licensed Drivers	138	235	+97	70%
Vehicle Registrations	135	303	+168	124%

As we approach the final year of the five-year span of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58), a majority of the directives to NHTSA to establish performance standards for critical vehicle safety technology are overdue or unfulfilled. Moreover, the Agency is responsible for a range of initiatives aimed at reducing risky driving decisions such as speeding, and 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 crucial 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.

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) and advanced

impaired driving prevention technology, will be game-changing. History has proven this approach to be valuable. Research from the NHTSA has estimated that, "From 1968 through 2019, NHTSA's safety standards prevented more than 860,000 deaths on the nation's roads, 49 million nonfatal injuries, and damage to 65 million vehicles. In 2019 alone, these standards prevented about 40,000 deaths, 1.9 million nonfatal injuries, and damage to 3.8 million vehicles," and "[F]rom 1968 to 2019, the comprehensive societal benefits amounted to $17.3 trillion, using 2019 dollars. In contrast, the total costs for the 52 years combined are roughly $1 trillion."[xxv] 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. The Agency's ability to effectively protect the public and minimize potential safety risks necessitates additional funding and resources, including for hiring staff with essential skills and expertise.

The enduringly high numbers of traffic fatalities and injuries demand decisive action, and this Committee plays a critical role in our efforts to do so. Providing adequate funding and staff resources to the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies will ensure timely implementation of the safety requirements and address the urgent need to advance additional proven and cost-effective solutions to prevent crashes and save lives.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Jill Ingrassia, Vice President
AAA Public Affairs

Michael Brooks, Executive Director
Center for Auto Safety

Jennifer Tierney, Chair
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH)

Jack Gillis
Consumer Federation of America

Rosemary Shahan, President
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Amy Cohen, Founder and President
Families for Safe Streets

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
Kids and Car Safety

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

Russell Swift, Co-Chair
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Torine Creppy, President
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Stephen Hargarten, MD, MPH, Founding President
Society for the Advancement of Violence and Injury Research

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
Trauma Foundation

Tami Friedrich, President
Truck Safety Coalition

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

[i] Traffic Safety Facts: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2023, April 2025, DOT HS 813 705 .

[ii] Traffic Safety Facts 2022: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Data, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 656, Dec. 2024 [Annual Report 2022]; and Traffic Safety Facts: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2023, April 2025, DOT HS 813 705 [Overview 2023]; [comparing 2013 to 2023].

[iii] Traffic Safety Facts: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2023, April 2025, DOT HS 813 705 [Overview 2023].

[iv] Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2024, DOT HS 813 710, April 2025.

[v] Id.

[vi] The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised), NHTSA, Feb. 2023, DOT HS 813 403, available at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403.

[vii] Traffic Safety Facts: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2023, April 2025, DOT HS 813 705 [Overview 2023].

[viii] Id.

[ix] *Id*. Note, the 76 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2022. 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 2022, it increased by 27 percent, and between 2015 and 2016, it increased by 14 percent.

[x] *Id*. Note, the 117 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of people injured in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2022. 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 people injured in truck-involved crashes increased by 59 percent, and between 2016 to 2022, it increased by 19 percent, and between 2015 and 2015, it increased by 14 percent.

[xi] Traffic Safety Facts Research Note, Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2023. DOT HS 813 705, April 2025.

[xii] Id.

[xiii] Id.

[xiv] Id. These crashes are known to be underreported and undercounted.

[xv] 2024 Dangerous by Design report. Available here: https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/

[xvi] National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). NonTraffic Surveillance: Fatality and injury statistics in non-traffic crashes in 2021 (Report No. DOT HS 813 539). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

[xvii] Child Hot Car Dangers Fact Sheet, Kids and Car Safety, available here: https://www.kidsandcars.org/document_center/download/hot-cars/Heatstroke-fact-sheet.pdf

[xviii] The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Dec. 2022, DOT HS 813 403. (Economic and Societal Impact 2019).

[xix] Economic and Societal Impact 2019.

[xx] CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, available at https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm, calculation Jan. 2021 – Jan. 2024.

[xxi] Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers – 2019, Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, March 2021.

[xxii] U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Transportation Statistics Annual Report 2023 (Washington, DC: 2023). https://doi.org/10.21949/1529944

[xxiii] FY2025 Budget Highlights, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Department of Transportation. Available here: https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2024-03/DOT_Budget_Highlights_FY_2025_508.pdf; and Public Law 94-387, August 14, 1976, Available here: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-90/pdf/STATUTE-90-Pg1171.pdf#page=8

[xxiv] National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2023, December). Traffic safety facts 2021: A compilation of motor vehicle traffic crash data (Report No. DOT HS 813 527). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

[xxv] Fatalities, Injuries, and Crashes Prevented by Vehicle Safety Technologies and Associated FMVSS, 1968 to 2019 – Passenger Cars and LTVs, DOT HS 813 611, Dec. 2024, and Historical Analysis of Costs and Benefits of FMVSS for Passenger Cars and LTVs on a Calendar-Year Basis, DOT HS 813 647, Dec. 2024.