

## **Senate Passes DRIVE Act – Worst “Safety Title” in the Last 25 Years**

### **Public Health and Safety Groups and Family Members Who Have Lost a Loved One in a Preventable Crash Respond to the Passage of the 6-Year Highway Bill**

*Lawmakers Must Spend the Next Three Months Working to Get This Right –  
the Cost of Inaction is Too High*

**Nearly 200,000 People will be Killed and 14 Million Injured in Crashes over 6 Years  
Major Changes and Improvements Essential to Gain Public Support**

Washington, D.C. (July 30, 2015) – Today the Senate passed the DRIVE Act (H.R. 22), the multi-year, multi-billion dollar surface transportation reauthorization bill that moves construction projects and industry interests forward, but highway and auto safety protections backwards. The legislation contains numerous provisions that pander to auto and trucking industries at the cost of more deaths and injuries on our streets and highways in the next six years. Many Senators, including Senators Nelson (D-FL), Blumenthal (D-CT), Markey (D-MA), Leahy (D-VT), Wicker (R-MS), Feinstein (D-CA) and Booker (D-NJ), stood with consumer and safety groups and families of crash victims and sponsored numerous amendments to strike anti-safety, special interest roll backs and add pro-safety proposals. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership thwarted consideration of nearly all of these safety-related provisions by blocking votes on all amendments except a few dealing with non-transportation issues.

National public health and safety organizations and families of victims of motor vehicle and motor carrier crashes urge Congress to remedy the indefensible anti-safety provisions in the DRIVE Act. Over the next three months, Congress needs to make essential changes and improvements to the bill.

**Jackie Gillan**, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, “This is the first time in over 25 years that the Senate has not advanced critical highway safety measures needed to stop the mounting carnage on our roads. Without changes and improvements the so-called DRIVE Act steers safety into a ditch. This bill should be towed away and taken in for serious repairs. If this bill becomes law by next summer, family road trips will be fraught with dangers because the Senate failed to protect public safety. Families will be sharing the road with more high risk teen truck drivers, more oversized triple trailer trucks, and more fatigued truck drivers exempted from hours of service rules. Additionally, the Senate bill will keep consumers in the dark about deadly safety defects in the used car they buy or the safety record of the company they hire to move their household goods. It is imperative that over the next three months of the short-term patch, leaders in both the Senate and House fix these provisions and add the protections that are needed.”

**Georges Benjamin, M.D.**, Executive Director, American Public Health Association stated, “Motor vehicle crashes impose an unnecessary emotional and economic toll on our citizens. By any measure, 33,000 deaths and over 2 million injuries every year is a public health epidemic. There are commonsense solutions available that can dramatically prevent and reduce the death and injury toll on our roads and highways. We know what to do and we need the

political leadership to get it done. I urge Congress to use the 3-month extension to readjust priorities and put the health and safety of the public first.”

**Ken Rimer**, stepfather of Natasha Weigel, victim of a General Motors ignition switch defect, “Since learning that Natasha was killed when her airbag failed to deploy as a result of the General Motors ignition switch defect, I have worked tirelessly to ensure other families don’t experience my pain and loss because of auto industry cover-ups and NHTSA carelessness. Numerous congressional hearings have identified practical legislative changes that are needed but the Senate bill rejected these reforms in favor of a ‘business as usual’ solution. Although the DRIVE Act includes a modest increase in monetary fines that the agency can assess, they are still grossly inadequate and will never serve as a serious deterrent to corporations purposely concealing defects that cause deaths and injuries. There must be criminal penalties for automakers that knowingly conceal defects that lead to death and injury. The political influence that auto makers have in Washington, D.C. should not come at the price of the American public. While nothing can bring my stepdaughter back, we need a system where auto executives are accountable to the public and not just corporate profits.”

**Jennifer Tierney**, Board Member of Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways and Member of the Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee, “In all my years of volunteering as a truck safety advocate since my dad was killed in a truck crash in 1983, I have never felt more abandoned by political leaders in the Senate, several of whom we have counted on as supporters in the past. Every year about 4,000 people needlessly die in truck crashes -- the equivalent of a catastrophic commercial airplane crash every week. Congress would never consider passing legislation that upgraded airport facilities and advanced the aviation industry agenda but did nothing to improve public safety like it is with surface transportation in the DRIVE Act. The Senate would never let that happen, nor should it now in the face of truck safety needs that cry out for reasoned and reasonable safety countermeasures.”

**Jack Gillis**, author of *The Car Book* and Director of Public Affairs for the Consumer Federation of America, “Consumers expect that when there is a major safety problem, their political leaders will be on their side to address it and mitigate risk. The Senate bill gets a failing grade for protecting corporate misbehavior and malfeasance over consumer safety. The bill requires rental car companies to repair vehicles under recall for defects but not families who buy from a used car dealer. Nearly three out of four car buyers purchase a used vehicle and the Senate did not close a loophole that allows used car dealers to sell unrepaired recalled vehicles. This is unacceptable and offers second rate safety protections to the millions of consumers who choose to buy, or can only afford, a second hand car.”

**Janette Fennell**, Founder and President of KidsAndCars.org, “Eleven children have died so far this year in hot cars. Tomorrow is National Heatstroke Prevention and Awareness Day and we are sending the widespread message of ‘Look Before You Lock’ to the American public. But unfortunately, this message will not reach every family and children will continue to die until Congress requires the Department of Transportation to complete research and a rulemaking on technologies that warn a driver that a child remains in the back seat. Senators Bill Nelson (D-FL), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced the Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 2015 (S. 1743) which includes this critical step, but it was a huge missed opportunity that

the provision was not a part of the DRIVE Act passed by the Senate today. I urge Congress to take this vital step to save children's lives during the three-month extension."

**Daphne Izer**, Founder of Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT), "My son Jeff and three of his friends were killed on October 10, 1993, when a Walmart truck driver fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into their car on the Maine Turnpike. For the last 20 years, I have worked to combat the deadly problem of truck driver fatigue. The DRIVE Act continues to coddle special trucking interests by allowing whole segments of the industry to get permanent exemptions from critical safety rules. This is not a complicated issue but a real world danger that affects everyone on our roads, sadly even comedian Tracy Morgan who was seriously injured in a crash caused by a dozing truck driver. The public understands and overwhelmingly opposes longer hours for truck drivers. A poll conducted last October showed that 80% of Americans don't want Congress to increase the working and driving hours of truck drivers. Public opposition and safety are secondary to the Senate's continuing efforts to appease special trucking interests with safety repeals and setbacks that lead to more crashes, deaths and injuries."

**Joan Claybrook**, Chair, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH) and former Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), "Today the Senate turned its back on the public and ran into the arms of special interests. In all of my years working on highway and auto safety, I have never seen such a partisan and pointed attack on public safety. The DRIVE Act puts lifesaving highway and truck safety rules on the auction block and special interests were the highest bidders. As Senators return home in August and are driving around their states, I hope they realize the damage they are doing and the danger they are causing by pressing ahead with this deadly legislation. There should be no victory laps or self-congratulations for passing such a horrific bill. I urge the public to contact their lawmakers and stand up for their right to safety. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx has repeatedly stated that safety is his top priority and we support that position. It is not enough for Congress to send President Obama a long-term transportation funding bill; it must also include a long-term commitment to reducing highway deaths and injuries. Right now the Senate bill falls dangerously short and sets back several Obama Administration safety initiatives. It does not deserve the Administration's support without major changes. There is still time to fix this bill. Members should do right by their constituents who cast a vote to get them elected, not just those lobbyists who wrote a campaign check."

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