

Additional Questions for the Record
Answered by William C. Wallace, Policy Analyst
Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports
For the Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
“Legislative Hearing on VIN Database and Auto Whistleblower Bills”
September 25, 2015

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky

1. Volkswagen deliberately built into their diesel cars a defeat device to cheat emissions testing. Both the VIN database and whistleblower bills are drafted to deal only with safety defects and noncompliance in vehicles, they do not reach vehicle emissions. While I have other concerns with these bills, if they move forward, we should consider whether to expand them to address emissions problems.

a. If a VIN database bill were to move forward, would you support a provision permitting the use of information received from the database for purposes of emissions related recalls?

As mentioned in the testimony delivered before the Subcommittee on September 25, 2015, Consumers Union has concerns with the VIN database bill. For instance, we are concerned that the database would stretch NHTSA’s already-limited resources. With adequate funding, a VIN database could provide consumer benefits, and we would support a provision permitting the use of information received from the database for purposes of emissions-related recalls.

b. If a whistleblower bill were to move forward, would you support including reporting of noncompliance with EPA emissions standards and fuel economy requirements?

As mentioned at the Subcommittee hearing on September 25, 2015, Consumers Union is concerned that the bill does not adequately incentivize someone to come forward, risking their career, to warn of a safety problem. If this issue were addressed, and proper agency roles recognized, we would support a provision allowing a whistleblower reporting noncompliance with EPA emissions standards or fuel economy requirements to be eligible for an award.