

**Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee  
Hearing on  
“Enhancing Vehicle Technology to Prevent Drunk Driving”**

*March 14, 2019*

You will hear this statistic or some form of it many times today—more than 10,000 people die every year from drunk driving crashes. It is the leading cause of traffic crash deaths in the country. In my home state of New Jersey, drunk driving killed 125 people in 2017. And we shouldn't forget that drunk driving not only kills the people who drink and drive, it often kills others.

This Committee has spent lots of time over the past few years exploring ways to make our roads safer. Yet, this issue is

rarely discussed. So I am glad we are finally shining a light on the problem.

The thing is, drunk driving is preventable. But the statistics haven't really changed since the mid-1990s. Drunk driving has killed around 10,000 people every year for the past 25 years. That's more than 250,000 people who did not have to die.

We know it's bad. The people who drive drunk know it's bad. But despite the statistics and despite all the tragic stories, they still choose to drive drunk—whether it's because they are too impaired to make a reasonable decision, or they can't read their own level of intoxication.

We can no longer rely only on education campaigns or punishment after the fact. The average drunk driver has driven

drunk more than 80 times before the first arrest. Fifty to seventy-five percent of drunk driving offenders will drive drunk again. We need to explore the ways we can stop this cycle.

There are devices available today to help. Many state laws require ignition interlocks, which prevent the car from starting if alcohol is detected through a breathalyzer or other system, for repeat offenders. Now 30 states and Washington, DC, require ignition interlocks even for first time offenders. These devices have been shown to be very effective in stopping repeated offenses while they are installed.

Ignition interlocks, while quite effective, are generally a temporary measure, used as a punishment after someone is caught driving drunk. Use of the device can be intrusive—it may take up to 30 seconds to get a reading.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration teamed up with a group of automakers, the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety, or ACTs, to engage in a research program to study advanced technology to help eliminate drunk driving.

The program, known as the Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, or DADSS, Program has been exploring technology to automatically detect when a driver is intoxicated and prevent the car from starting. Unlike current interlock devices, DADSS technology would not affect normal driving behavior.

The program is looking at a breath-based system and a touch-based system. Each of these technologies would be fully

integrated into vehicles. The hope is that these technologies could be made available as an option for every new car or for installation in cars previously purchased. This may be particularly important for parents with teens just learning to drive.

The DADSS program shows a lot of potential to significantly reduce drunk driving. The program started 10 years ago, and it's made significant progress developing these technologies. But I'm concerned that progress has stalled. DADSS technology is being tested in a few cars. But a few cars aren't enough.

I look forward to hearing today about how we can encourage progress in the DADSS program as well as any other

vehicle technology that can help eradicate drunk driving and save thousands of lives.

Thank you, and I yield the balance of my time to  
Congresswoman Dingell.