

Opening Statement of Chairman Bob Latta
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
“Drugged Driving”
July 11, 2018

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning and thank you to all our witnesses for appearing today. “Drive sober or get pulled over.” It’s a phrase that we have heard in classrooms and television and radio ads, and seen on billboards along the highway. Everyone knows driving while under the influence of alcohol is dangerous and unacceptable, and there are methods to identify and apprehend those who break the law. Unfortunately, the consequences of driving under the influence of drugs has not been elevated until recently, and drugged driving presents new challenges to both law enforcement and health professionals.

Amid the devastating opioid crisis, and as more states legalize the use of marijuana, tackling this problem is now more important than ever. According to the Governors Highway Safety Association, in 2016 the number of drivers who were fatally injured in accidents with drugs in their system surpassed the number of those with alcohol in their system for the first time.

As marijuana use increases in the general population, it continues to be the most common drug found in fatally injured drivers. Marijuana has been proven to increase drowsiness and decrease reaction speed, both of which limit people’s ability to drive safely.

Twenty percent of drivers killed in crashes in 2016 tested positive for opioids. Part of this can be tied to addiction and negligence, but legally prescribed opioids also play a role. When a patient is prescribed an opioid for pain relief, they may not understand the possible effects. It is important that physicians and pharmacists draw attention to the warning labels and give consumers the information they need to take their medication safely.

Driving while impaired is illegal in all 50 states, but there is no set definition of drug impairment and testing practices vary from state to state. Unlike with alcohol, there is no widely used drug field test comparable to a breathalyzer. Instead, most officers learn how to recognize signs of drug impairment, including driver’s verbal and physical responses to questions and instructions. Teaching

these methods have been a challenge, and the lack of data on drugged driving only exacerbates that challenge.

New methods for roadside drug testing are also being developed and deployed in several states, including saliva tests. At their summit in March, NHTSA committed to examining the operation of these tests, and improving the data the government has about drugged-driving related fatalities. Understanding the problem is an important first step to fixing it.

Today, we're here to discuss what local, State, and Federal efforts are being made to combat this issue, and what else needs to be done. Public education is an essential component of fighting drugged driving. We believe that with improvements in awareness, the dangers of drugged driving will be as well-understood as drunk driving. Additionally, we believe our witnesses can detail what Congress can consider to help stop this dangerous trend.

Almost one year ago, this Committee unanimously passed the SELF DRIVE Act. Getting safe, self-driving cars on the road would prevent the senseless deaths of thousands of Americans on our roadways every year. Until that day comes, we need to do all we can to raise awareness of the dangers of impaired driving.

More recently, this committee developed a package of over 50 bills, including my legislation, the INFO Act, to address the opioids crisis. These bills were included in the bipartisan House-passed opioids package. My bill creates a public dashboard consisting of comprehensive information and data on nationwide efforts to combat the opioid crisis. Establishing a one-stop-shop makes it easier for individuals to access and analyze data that could lead to real solutions and save lives. We are committed to the communities and families confronting this challenge on a daily basis and will continue investigating key areas that contribute to the crisis.

Thank you again for being here and I look forward to your testimony. I yield to Ranking Member, the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Schakowsky, for five minutes.