

Opening Statement
Chair Jan Schakowsky
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Summer Driving Dangers: Exploring Ways to Protect Drivers and Their Families”
May 23, 2019

Good morning, thank you for being here with us.

Today’s hearing is about promoting auto safety and raising awareness about the threats families face on our nation’s roads as we enter summer driving season.

One of those threats is child vehicular heatstroke, which occurs when a child is left in an overheating car. I would like to take a moment to recognize two families who have endured such tragedies, and turned their pain into action, advocating for legislation to make sure no child ever dies in an overheating car.

Miles and Carol Harrison from Purcellville, Virginia. They are the parents of Chase, who died at only 21 months old on July 8, 2008, after being unknowingly left in a hot car.

Erin Holley of Charleston, South Carolina. Her now 2-year-old son, Finn, was 4 weeks old when he was unknowingly left in their family car. Fortunately, his parents quickly realized their mistake and rescued their baby boy. But just a few months later, one of Finn's daycare classmates died in a hot car. Shortly after, a 7-month old child in Erin’s community also died in an overheated car.

There are far too many ways for parents to lose a child that we can’t control. We have a duty to do everything we can to ensure that parents don’t lose a child when we can prevent it.

52 children died of heat stroke in cars last year. FIFTY-TWO. In most cases, the parent accidentally leaves the child in the car. Eight children died in hot cars so far this year. Just yesterday, a 5-month-old girl tragically died in a van sitting outside of her daycare. Education alone cannot solve this crisis. Even the most attentive parent can get distracted and inadvertently leave their child in a rapidly warming vehicle.

A simple alert notifying parents that they left their child in their car can save lives. Yesterday, I held a press conference where several such technologies were on display, proving that we have the technology needed to prevent many of these tragedies.

You get a warning when you leave keys in the car or when you leave your lights on. Every new car should be equipped with technologies to alert parents if they leave a child in the car.

That’s why I am eager to reintroduce the HOT CARS Act with Congressman Ryan to mandate that new cars will come equipped with an alert system.

I also look forward to exploring many other safety technologies—such as automatic emergency braking, lane departure warnings, and pedestrian detection—that exist today and can dramatically reduce the number of automobile fatalities and injuries every year.

But deployment of these safety features is slow, and often reserved for those willing to pay a premium for advanced safety features.

It's time for Congress to take decisive action to keep families safe.

And we have a track record of success.

Last year, rear back-up cameras became standard in new vehicles, an issue I championed after hearing devastating stories from parents whose children died in back-over accidents. Thanks to the commitment of those parents, children today are more protected.

I look forward to exploring how we can ensure all cars can be equipped with the best safety features.

