

**Statement of Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce  
Hearing on “Legislation to Make Cars in America Safer.”**

*July 24, 2019*

With more than 40,000 deaths and 4.6 million injuries in 2017 alone, the chaos and destruction on our nation’s roads has reached epidemic levels. And, unfortunately, automobile fatalities are on the rise. Motor vehicle death rates have steeply increased since 2014, after nearly a decade of falling.

A crisis of this magnitude demands swift and decisive action. Action to deploy innovative, lifesaving crash avoidance technologies like automatic emergency braking, forward collision warning, and lane keeping support, which hold the promise of cutting the number of automobile crashes in half. Action to develop technologies that can automatically detect

when a driver is intoxicated and prevent the vehicle from moving. Action to modernize the 5-Star Safety Rating for the 21st century automobile; enhance recall efforts; and finalize over two dozen safety mandates languishing at NHTSA.

This hearing is the opening salvo in our campaign to bring tragedies on our nation's roads to an end. And we are starting with a tranche of bills that will help eradicate some of the most devastating auto safety issues, like child vehicular heatstroke.

As we learned in May when this Subcommittee held a hearing on summer driving dangers, 823 children have died from heatstroke after being left in hot cars over the last 20 years. 52 last year alone, and 21 children so far this year. Since that hearing, twelve more children have perished.

No child should have their right to life taken from them because they become trapped in a hot car. Fortunately, technologies exist today that can end these senseless tragedies—technologies that can alert drivers to the presence of a child in the vehicle or remind a driver to check their backseat before leaving the car. Regrettably, these sorts of life saving technologies have not been widely deployed.

I applaud Chairwoman Schakowsky and Congressman Ryan for their work on the Hot Cars Act—legislation that would require vehicles to be equipped with safety technologies to detect and alert the driver to the presence of a child or occupant in a rear seat of a vehicle after the engine is shut off. And I look forward to exploring how these technological revolutions can save lives.

I also look forward to exploring how we can ensure that technological innovations—like keyless ignition systems—do not actually present safety issues. Keyless ignition systems provide an added level of convenience for the driver—merely sit in the vehicle and push to start, all with your keys in your pocket. But that added convenience has been tied to a troubling rise in carbon monoxide deaths—over three dozen since 2006.

Without the physical motion of turning a key, some drivers inadvertently forget to turn off the vehicle. And some keyless ignition systems permit the engine to continue idling even when the driver exits the vehicle with the keys. If the vehicle is left in an enclosed area, tragedy can ensue as dangerous levels of carbon monoxide build.

Such a tragedy claimed the lives of Dr. James D. Livingston and Dr. Sherry H. Penney. I thank Ms. Livingston for testifying today and sharing her parents' story. And I applaud Chairwoman Schakowsky for introducing the PARK IT Act, legislation that would ensure the engine of a keyless ignition vehicle automatically shuts off if left idling for an unreasonable amount of time.

I also look forward to discussing two impaired driving bills being considered here today. With 10,000 deaths—30 percent of all fatal crashes— tied to drunk driving and troubling increases in the rate of drug-impaired driving, we must double down on our efforts to prevent such threats to automobile safety.

I thank our witnesses for testifying this morning, and I look forward to the discussion.