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May 11, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chair
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
B-305 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Price:

In anticipation of your mark-up of the FY 2016 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, we wanted to provide you with priorities relating to the safety of kids in and around motor vehicles and highways.

The mission of Safe Kids, and its more than 400 coalitions in every state of the U.S. is to reduce unintentional injury, the number one killer of kids, and crashes involving motor vehicles cause the greatest number of deaths and injuries, though significant progress has been made. The number of children dying in car crashes has declined by 58% from 1987 to 2013. This translates into 6,516 kids dying in 1994 and 2,736 in 2013. However, it remains the number one killer of kids ages 1 to 19.

All of our work—whether programs, education or public policy—is evidence based. We believe this data demonstrates that there is a correlation between the federal government investment and road safety. It is strong evidence that the work you do in setting the funding for road safety has a compelling impact on whether all of us are safer, especially the most vulnerable, our kids. This means that the work of the Department of Transportation and agencies like the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is indispensable.

We know that the role of federal investment in implementing laws, making sensible regulation and policy innovation is a game changer when it comes to child safety, especially involving motor vehicle crashes. The impact of the requirements involving the use of child restraint systems is just one example of success. But kids 19 and under dying in car crashes remains the number one killer—and thus we cannot let up on our vigilance.

NHTSA Funding. However, if child restraint systems are defective, it is clear the risk factor will increase. In 2014, in addition to the recall of more than 10 million motor vehicles in 2014, it was also a record year for the recall of car seats. More than 6 million car seats involving one manufacturer were recalled because of a defective buckle. It is for this reason that we are concerned that the proposed bill did not agree to the increase recommended by the President that would almost double the size of the agency's defects team—this is consistent with the increase of recall complaints from 45,000 to 80,000. We hope that the full committee will enable the agency to improve its efforts on recalls, a need that has been expressed clearly in a number of congressional hearings.

NHTSA Data Collection. Earlier this year, we joined other safety advocates such as MADD and AAA to encourage you to fund additional personnel to support the collection of data involving distracted and impaired driving, occupant protection, and pedestrian and bike safety. We urge the full committee to support this priority.

Heatstroke. When the weather gets warmer, Safe Kids works with NHTSA and other safety groups on a tragic loss of life that occurs when a child is left behind in a car and the child dies of heatstroke. On April 20, 2 ½ year old Alpha Koryor was found by his mother after his father left him in their car. The father was drinking.

It is important that NHTSA continue its work on creating awareness about this risk. Recent surveys of the public demonstrate that there has been a substantial increase in public awareness of this important child safety issue, with resulting changes in behavior by parents and others. This increased awareness helped to reduce the number of child deaths to 30 in 2014, the second lowest since 1998, when record keeping began. This progress must be sustained.

The President proposed the spending of \$1.6 million for this purpose and the evidence shows that this is funding well spent. We hope that the Committee will provide this funding and consider the report language proposed below:

Child Vehicle Heatstroke Prevention – The Committee commends NHTSA for its work in heightening awareness about the dangers involving heatstroke in young children, and its collaboration with safety educators and advocates. The Committee is aware of recent surveys which demonstrate that there has been a substantial increase in public awareness of this important child safety issue, with resulting changes in behavior by parents and others. This increased awareness helped to reduce the number of child deaths to 30 in 2014, the second lowest since 1998, when record keeping began. This progress must be sustained. The Committee urges NHTSA to continue to engage with a broad range of groups and agencies in its prevention campaign. The Committee further urges NHTSA to coordinate with FHWA and state DOTs to encourage states, particularly those with the most deaths, to use existing communications platforms to enhance ongoing awareness programs during the hot weather season, such as dynamic highway message signs.

We thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions, 202.662.0606, agreeen@safekids.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Green', is positioned above the typed name.

Anthony Green
Director, Public Policy
Safe Kids Worldwide

cc: The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart, Chair
The Honorable David Price, Ranking Member