



ADVOCATES
for Highway & Auto Safety

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SAFETY ADVOCATES PRAISE SENATE INTRODUCTION OF MOTOR VEHICLE AND HIGHWAY SAFETY LEGISLATION

Provisions Include Advances in Vehicle Safety, Consumer Protection and Traffic Laws

(Washington, D.C. – July 29, 2011) – Legislation to improve the safety of vehicles, advance traffic safety laws in states and enhance consumer information has been introduced by the Democratic leaders of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. Senator Mark Pryor (D-AR), Senator John D. Rockefeller (D-WV) and others are sponsoring legislation to fund safety programs and activities of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the federal agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation responsible for auto and traffic safety.

The new safety provisions included in the Motor Vehicle and Highway Safety Improvement Act of 2011 (MVHSIA), or Mariah’s Law, named after an Arkansas teen killed in a crash involving texting, address teen driver licensing, improved motor vehicle safety standards, distracted and impaired driving, child passenger safety, and safety defect and consumer information reforms.

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 5 to 34. And the annual highway death toll costs our nation over \$230 billion a year,” said Jacqueline Gillan, vice president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates). “Too many people are needlessly dying because states have been slow to enact laws to protect teen drivers, keep drunk drivers off our roads and ban the dangerous and deadly practice of texting while driving.”

Gillan commended the bill sponsors for the commonsense and cost-effective provisions in the bill. The bill includes incentive grant funds to states that enact stronger laws addressing these serious safety problems.

“As a parent and a lawmaker” said Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), “I want to take every reasonable safety precaution to ensure that our teen drivers are safe and well-prepared for the serious responsibility that comes with getting a license. This legislation will give young drivers better education and more experience before they get out on the roads, keeping us all safer and saving lives.”

Major provisions of teen driving legislation, S.528, the Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act, introduced by Senator Gillibrand and co-sponsored by Senator Amy

Klobuchar (D-MN), are in the MVHSIA. The bill includes a \$22 million grant program to encourage state adoption of teen driving laws that phase in driving privileges as a teen becomes more experienced behind the wheel. States that qualify for funds would need to have laws that include restrictions on the number of teen passengers allowed with a novice driver, a ban on cell phone use and nighttime driving limits.

“As the mother of a teenager, I know firsthand how important it is to keep our roads safe,” said Senator Klobuchar. “These measures will provide states with effective guidelines to help ensure drivers’ safety and prevent risky behavior – especially among teen drivers. I will continue to fight to strengthen protection for drivers and make our roads safer for everyone.”

Joan Claybrook, Consumer Co-Chair of Advocates, and a former NHTSA Administrator, added that “We are pleased Committee leaders included measures to improve consumer protection and safety. The bill directs NHTSA to issue a standard to ensure the reliability and performance of electronic systems that operate and control vital vehicle safety systems. Consumers also will have better access to government information about safety-related data, recalls and defects as well as restored confidence in government safety investigations.”

Congressional hearings last year on the agency’s handling of sudden unintended acceleration revealed deficiencies that the legislation addresses by including whistle blower protection, prohibiting potential conflicts of interest by former NHTSA employees, and increased penalties for corporate misbehavior.

“This bill is about saving lives,” said Senator Mark Pryor, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Insurance. “We’ve strengthened programs designed to stop dangerous driving behavior, and we’ve stepped up vehicle safety so that families are protected by strong safety standards and devices when an accident does occur.”

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Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (www.saferoads.org) is a coalition of consumer, public health, medical, safety and insurance organizations working together to improve highway and auto safety policies in Congress, states and Executive branch agencies.