



COMMITTEE ON  
**ENERGY & COMMERCE**  
**DEMOCRATS**  
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Pallone's Opening Statement at Autonomous Vehicles Hearing**

*Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) submitted the following opening remarks for the record for a Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade hearing titled "Disrupter Series: Self-Driving Cars."*

It's easy to understand why self-driving cars have captivated the public, the media, and, of course, Congress. With 94 percent of car crashes being caused by drunk or distracted driving or other human errors, the future of fully automated driving is bursting with possibilities.

Experts have said that if human error is out of the picture, collision rates will fall significantly from the more than 38,000 Americans killed in car crashes last year.

Self-driving cars have the potential to improve lives as well as save them. Autonomous vehicles could give seniors and people with disabilities independence and mobility, and remove barriers to employment and social interaction. They also could possibly reduce traffic in our cities and revolutionize public transportation.

Autonomous vehicles have great potential, but they must be deployed responsibly.

Robust cybersecurity is essential. As with all new technologies, we must demand "security by design," where security is not an afterthought but is built into the product from day one. As we saw just a few weeks ago, attacks on our digital infrastructure are not hypothetical. And I look forward to the hearing tomorrow when we review those attacks in this Committee. But unlike that attack and some other cyber breaches, attacks on computer-driven and connected cars are a threat to human life.

We also need to see "privacy by design," with consumer privacy baked in from the start. Autonomous vehicles function by collecting and processing vast amounts of information from their surroundings. For example, most collect vehicle location data and many operate using cameras and sensors that can "see" inside and outside the vehicle. Such data should be property protected and only used for operation of the vehicle and not shared.

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Finally, safety must be the highest priority as autonomous vehicles have already begun to share our streets. The American public must know that these cars are safe before they are widely deployed on public streets. The companies manufacturing these vehicles cannot just say “trust us.”

The challenge is twofold. First, we must ensure safety during the decades of transition time when autonomous cars share the road with human drivers. The interaction between humans and computerized vehicles present unique challenges. Second, the autonomous vehicles must be ready to deal with all foreseen and unforeseen scenarios before they are permitted to operate without a human driver in the driver’s seat. These scenarios include being prepared for wet, snow-covered pavement to confronting a policeman who is using hand signals to redirect traffic.

Today’s hearing will focus on fully autonomous cars, but I will note that exciting semi-autonomous technologies are already in the marketplace, such as automatic braking, which I am optimistic will become standard on all makes and models sooner than is currently promised.

I am hopeful that during today’s hearing we will explore the great potential of fully autonomous vehicles but also appreciate that their benefits could be decades away from being realized. Whatever the timeline, I am confident that America’s greatest minds will be able to meet the technological challenges ahead while prioritizing safety, privacy, and security. But together we also must address the challenge of any job losses that result from automation, including that of autonomous cars and trucks.

I would like to end by paying tribute to Clarence Ditlow, Executive Director of the Center for Auto Safety, who passed away late last week. Clarence was a tireless vehicle safety advocate who was known not just for holding auto manufacturers accountable, but also holding NHTSA and Congress accountable. He testified numerous times before Congress, and throughout his decades of auto safety advocacy, he worked on everything from the Pinto explosions and Firestone tires to most recently ignition switches and defective airbags. Cars, SUVs, and trucks are safer today because of Clarence, and he will be missed by the entire driving community.

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