



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at Drugged Driving Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection hearing on “Drugged Driving:”*

Today’s hearing explores the complex topic of drugged driving. We know that driving under the influence of some drugs presents dangers to everyone on the road. These drugs can impair judgment, slow reaction time, or distort perception.

At the same time, there are many unknowns about the correlation of drugs and car crashes, and I expect we will address some of them today. Hundreds of different drugs—including prescription, over-the-counter, and illicit drugs could affect a person’s driving. Unfortunately, the relationship between a specific drug’s effect on driving ability is still not well-understood. Different substances affect different people in different ways. Drugs are frequently used together; often, illicit drugs are used in the presence of alcohol. The combined effects of multiple drugs on driving performance requires more consideration.

The scope of the drugged-driving problem is also unclear. Today, there is no nationally accepted method for testing whether a driver is impaired by drugs. Because trace amounts of certain drugs can linger in a person’s system for weeks, a positive drug test result does not necessarily mean that the driver was impaired while driving. Moreover, the recording of data of accidents involving drivers with drugs in their system is inconsistent across jurisdictions, and nationwide data are incomplete.

We should take the issue of drugged driving seriously so that we can adequately address the problem. But because we must appropriately allocate resources, our review should be of impaired driving more broadly. We should not neglect the causes of impaired driving—especially alcohol-impaired driving, which remains the leading cause of traffic fatalities.

The statistics for drunk driving are alarming. Every two minutes a person is injured, and every 51 minutes a person is killed in a drunk-driving crash. The Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention reported that in 2016, more than 10,000 people were killed in alcohol-impaired crashes. Drunk driving accounts for about 28 percent of all traffic-related deaths.

And as reported just last week, one third of pedestrians killed in car crashes in 2016 were found to be over the legal alcohol limit. Of course, we should not blame these victims, who tried to do the right thing and not get behind the wheel when they had been drinking. But perhaps policies that encourage us to stay away from our cars also should consider that more people will be walking.

While the number of deaths linked to drugged driving is less clear than other causes of impaired driving, no one should drive impaired. If you are unable to function normally or safely when operating a motor vehicle, you should not get behind the wheel. Even common over-the-counter medicines can have adverse effects on driving performance.

And recent studies show that drowsy driving can be just as dangerous as drunk driving. In fact, my home state of New Jersey has a law that prohibits driving while drowsy. Under the law, a driver who goes without sleep for more than 24 consecutive hours and causes a fatal crash can be charged with vehicular homicide and face up to 10 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

Impaired driving takes on many forms. But the wreckage left behind is the same. It has devastating consequences to family, friends, neighborhoods, and communities across the country. I hope we continue to work together to fight impaired driving.

Thank you, I yield back.

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