Opening Statement
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
Hearing on "An Update on the Takata Recalls and Ruptures"
June 2, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing on the Takata airbag recall. The American people deserve to know what went wrong with Takata airbags, why it took so long to discover, and how this Committee and this Congress will respond to ensure that it never happens again.

Chairman Upton recently remarked about his airbag that deployed after hitting a deer, "maybe I'm lucky it wasn't a Takata."

At least 34 million Americans aren't so lucky. We have a guest here today, Angelina Sujata, who is a victim of a Takata airbag rupture. At least six people have been killed by their airbag – a supposed safety feature.

My biggest concern about this recall is that the root cause has not been determined. We've been told that a combination of factors – including humidity and age – contribute to airbag ruptures, but we don't know whether the flaw is in the design, manufacture, installation, or some other aspect of the airbag. That means we still can't be sure that the replacement airbags being installed right now are any safer. That isn't just dumb – it's dangerous. We need to know what caused this failure to make sure it doesn't happen again.

But as we wait for those questions to be answered, there are steps we can take right now to improve vehicle safety. Many of those are included in H.R. 1181, the Vehicle Safety Improvement Act – legislation I introduced earlier this year.

2014 was the year of the recall. Almost half of all cars on our roads were recalled. GM, Honda, and other major auto companies failed their customers – and lives were lost as a result. The Vehicle Safety Improvement Act takes valuable lessons from those recalls and addresses existing weaknesses in information sharing, oversight, and accountability regarding auto safety.

The Vehicle Safety Improvement Act includes several provisions that would have benefitted consumers whose cars have those faulty airbags:

- The bill would more than double NHTSA's funding for vehicle safety programs – a priority that has been severely underfunded by this Congress.
- H.R. 1181 would increase the quantity and quality of information shared by auto manufacturers with NHTSA, the public, and Congress. Had more information about the Takata airbag ruptures been catalogued and diagnosed earlier, lives could have been saved.
- The bill would require manufacturers to fix all recalled vehicles free of charge – rather than just those that were purchased within the past 10 years. Takata has indicated that age of airbags is a contributing factor to ruptures, and many of the vehicles with defective Takata airbags are more than 10 years old. They should clearly be subject to mandatory fixes.
- Under the legislation, NHTSA would also have new Imminent Hazard Authority to expedite recalls related to dangerous defects. It would eliminate the regional recall program, ensuring that all cars subject to a recall are repaired, regardless of their location. Both of those changes would have improved the speed, scope, and efficacy of the Takata recall.

The ongoing investigation into the Takata airbag ruptures may identify additional policies that would limit the risk of a similar recall occurring in the future. If it does, we should enact them as soon as possible. In the meantime, we can't afford to wait to act on legislation that we know would save lives.

It's not just Committee Democrats who want action. A who's who of leading consumer and auto safety organizations support H.R. 1181 and urge this Committee to move it forward without delay. I ask unanimous consent that their letter be added to the record.

I am eager to hear answers from our witnesses about what led to this massive failure, and how to prevent another one in the future. In the meantime, we cannot delay commonsense auto safety improvements that will save lives. I urge the Committee to advance the Vehicle Safety Improvement Act without delay, and I yield back.