

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Examining Legislative Options to Strengthen Motor Vehicle Safety, Ensure Consumer Choice and Affordability, and Cement U.S. Automotive Leadership”

January 13, 2026

As we consider the reauthorization of core motor vehicle safety programs administered by our nation’s auto safety agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), we must keep in mind the undeniable reality that tens of thousands of lives are lost on our roads each year.

NHTSA has an important mandate to save lives by establishing safety standards, investigating vehicle defects, and enforcing recalls. We must ensure NHTSA has the staff, resources, and authority it needs to protect Americans on our roadways.

This is particularly important as the Trump Administration slams the breaks on safety progress. In 2025, the Administration cut NHTSA staff by 25 percent, finished zero new safety rules, and cut in half the number of safety defect investigations.

As a result, safety standards that Congress mandated years ago are not yet complete or have been delayed. This includes rules to require new cars to deter drunk driving, avoid crashes, protect pedestrians, improve seatbelt usage, and avert child deaths in hot cars.

As we continue this reauthorization process, I look forward to working with Chair Guthrie to enhance safety, promote affordability, and ensure NHTSA delivers on its safety promise.

I am pleased to see that legislative proposals from Democratic members addressing many of the leading and emerging causes of vehicle crash fatalities and injuries are included in this hearing. We will consider proposals addressing driver distraction, drunk driving, vulnerable road users like pedestrians and bicyclists, and people getting trapped in cars when power is lost. We will also discuss bills tackling transparency related to the safety of driverless cars and consumer awareness about driver assistance features.

My bill, the Safety is Not for Sale Act, promotes affordability and consumer choice. It lets consumers buying a new car choose proven safety features to protect their families without having to pay for luxury finishes or convenience features like leather seats or a moonroof. This bill puts consumers, and their safety, first.

The Committee is also considering a bipartisan discussion draft, led by Representatives Dingell and Latta to regulate autonomous vehicles (AVs). AVs are a transformative technology

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that has the potential to reduce deaths and injuries, increase mobility, drive growth, and bring environmental benefits.

It's critical that AV legislation prioritize the safety of occupants and other road users like pedestrians, while also preserving access for first responders during emergencies, holding responsible parties accountable, and maintaining legal recourse for harmed consumers.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on these issues, and yield the balance of my time to Representative Dingell.