



MEMORANDUM

March 11, 2019

To: Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce Members and Staff

Fr: Committee on Energy and Commerce Staff

Re: Hearing on “Enhancing Vehicle Technology to Prevent Drunk Driving”

On Thursday, March 14, 2019, at 10:00 a.m. in the John D. Dingell Room, 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce will hold a hearing entitled, “Enhancing Vehicle Technology to Prevent Drunk Driving.”

I. BACKGROUND

Drunk driving is the number one cause of death on America’s roadways.¹ More than 10,000 deaths—about 30 percent of all fatal crashes—are caused by drunk driving each year. That translates to almost 30 people dying in drunk-driving crashes every day or one person every 48 minutes in 2017.² Drunk drivers tend to be younger with 42 percent of drivers involved in fatal drunk-driving crashes being between 16 and 24 years old in 2017.³ The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than \$44 billion.⁴ The average drunk driver has driven drunk 80 times before a first arrest.⁵

Beginning in the early 1980s through the mid-1990s, the number of deaths due to drunk driving decreased significantly.⁶ Raising the drinking age to 21 resulted in a reduced rate of

¹ Mothers Against Drunk Driving, *Drunk Driving Impacts Every American. Every Day.* (www.madd.org/the-problem/) (accessed Mar. 7, 2019).

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Drunk Driving* (www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving#issue-alcohol-effects) (accessed Mar. 9, 2019).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Impaired Driving: Get the Facts* (June 16, 2017) (www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving/impaired-drv_factsheet.html).

⁵ Mothers Against Drunk Driving, *Sober to Start* (www.madd.org/the-solution/drunk-driving/ignition-interlocks/) (accessed Mar. 8, 2019).

⁶ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Highway Data Loss Institute, *Alcohol and Drugs* (www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/alcohol-and-drugs/fatalityfacts/alcohol-and-drugs).

drunk driving crashes among young Americans.⁷ Similarly, lowering the legal alcohol limit to .08 percent blood alcohol content (BAC) is associated with a reduction in the proportion of alcohol-related fatal crashes.⁸ Since then, progress on alcohol-impaired driving has stalled.⁹

II. VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY TO PREVENT DRUNK DRIVING

An ignition interlock is an alcohol-sensing device connected to a vehicle's ignition to prevent it from starting if a driver has a predetermined blood alcohol content (BAC) level.¹⁰ All states have ignition interlock laws—some making it an optional condition after conviction, some requiring them for repeat offenders, and some requiring them for all offenders.¹¹ Recent studies have found that state laws requiring interlocks for all drunk driving offenders were associated with meaningful decreases in alcohol-involved fatal crashes.¹² According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ignition interlocks reduce repeat offenses for drunk driving by about 70 percent while they are installed.¹³

The Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS), which represents a group of automakers, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) are engaged in research of new alcohol-detection technology through a private-public partnership known as the Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS) Program.¹⁴ Unlike current interlock devices, the technology being researched and developed through the DADSS program would not require any additional action (such as blowing into an interlock device) to prevent a drunk driver from starting a vehicle. The goal is to develop technology that is accurate and precise at stopping drunk drivers while being unobtrusive and not creating any inconvenience to a sober driver.¹⁵ The program is exploring a breath-based system, which would measure BAC as the

⁷ Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, *Drunk Driving Crashes Reduced Since Drinking Age Was Raised to 21: Study* (Feb. 25, 2014) (drugfree.org/learn/drug-and-alcohol-news/drunk-driving-crashes-reduced-since-drinking-age-was-raised-to-21-study/).

⁸ Ralph Hingson, Timothy Heeren, and Michael Winter, *Effects of Recent 0.08% Legal Blood Alcohol Limits on Fatal Crash Involvement*, Injury Prevention (June 1, 2000).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *See* note 5.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Emma McGinty et al., *Ignition Interlock Laws: Effects on Fatal Motor Vehicle Crashes, 1982-2013*, American Journal of Preventive Medicine (2016); Elinore J. Kaufman and Douglas J. Wiebe, *Impact of State Ignition Interlock Laws on Alcohol-Involved Crash Deaths in the United States*, American Journal of Public Health (Apr. 06, 2016).

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Increasing Alcohol Ignition Interlock Use*, (www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving/ignition_interlock_states.html) (accessed Mar. 9, 2019).

¹⁴ Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, Home Page (www.dadss.org/).

¹⁵ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety* (one.nhtsa.gov/Vehicle-Safety/DADSS) (accessed Mar. 8, 2019).

driver breathes normally, and a touch-based system, which would measure BAC through current vehicle controls such as the start button or steering wheel.¹⁶

The DADSS program began in 2008 and Phase One of the program, which focused on the speed, accuracy, and precision of the technologies, was completed in 2011.¹⁷ The program entered a new phase in 2013 to reduce the size of the systems and ensure strict performance specifications are met.¹⁸ In 2018, DADSS partnered with the state of Virginia to conduct in-vehicle, on-road test trials of the DADSS technology.¹⁹

III. WITNESSES

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

The Hon. Joan Claybrook

Board Member
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
Former Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Robert Strassburger

President & CEO
Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety, Inc. (ACTS, Inc.)

Helen Witty

National President
Mothers Against Drunk Driving

David Kelly

Executive Director
Coalition of Ignition Interlock Manufacturers

¹⁶ Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, Home Page (www.dadss.org/).

¹⁷ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (one.nhtsa.gov/Vehicle-Safety/DADSS) (accessed Mar. 8, 2019).

¹⁸ Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, Frequently Asked Questions (www.dadss.org/faq/) (accessed Mar. 8, 2019).

¹⁹ Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, Virginia: The First State Partnership (www.dadss.org/virginia/) (accessed Mar. 8, 2019).