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JOINT STATEMENT OF
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Different Version of Highway Safety Bill by Republicans and Democrats Reflect Different Vision of Public Safety Needs in Response to the Largest Vehicle Safety Recalls in History and Mounting Truck Crash Deaths and Injuries

The Democratic and Republican Members of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee have two distinctly different visions for protecting the health and safety of American families on our roads and highways. For the first time in a quarter century, Members of the Senate Commerce Committee introduced partisan safety bills to be rolled into the overall surface transportation reauthorization bill. Unfortunately, the bills take very different approaches to addressing the unfinished safety agenda, with the Democratic bills, the Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 2015 (S. 1743) and the Truck Safety Act (S. 1739) advancing much needed safety reforms and the Republican bill, The Comprehensive Transportation and Consumer Protection Act of 2015 (S. 1732), maintaining the status quo and favoring corporate special interests. With the rising death and injury toll on our roads and highways due to large truck crashes and the record recall in 2014 of 60 million vehicles nationwide for safety defects involving over 125 deaths and hundreds of injuries, now is not the time to put the brakes on overdue safety improvements or jeopardize public safety by running in reverse.

“The Senate Commerce Committee has held over a dozen hearings these past two years examining numerous motor vehicle and motor carrier safety programs and regulatory deficiencies that are impeding progress in bringing down highway crashes, deaths and injuries. We know the problems and we know what to do. S. 1743 and S. 1739 propose commonsense and cost-effective solutions that will result in safer cars, safer trucks, safer drivers and safer roads,” stated Jackie Gillan, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

S. 1732, introduced by Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John Thune (R-SD), Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security Chairwoman Deb Fischer (R-NE) and Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS), will mean business as usual for automakers in reporting and handling deadly safety defects, for trucking companies that want to hide their safety ratings from public view, and for depriving the federal safety watchdog, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), of needed resources. One of the most dangerous provisions in the bill allows teen truckers. The bill will permit teenagers to drive 80,000 pound trucks on our interstate highways, a misguided idea that was resoundingly rejected ten years ago because of the unacceptable high crash risk of young drivers.

“It is foolhardy and fraught with serious and unacceptable risks to allow 18 year olds to get behind the wheel of an 80,000 pound truck on high speed Interstate highways for long hours.” said Daphne Izer, Founder of Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT), whose son Jeff was killed with three of his friends in a crash caused by a Walmart driver who fell asleep at the wheel. “In the states represented by Senators on the Commerce Committee alone, 1,500 constituents are needlessly dying year after year in preventable truck crashes. Lowering the current minimum age of 21 to 18 for interstate truck drivers will make matters worse and should be immediately rejected.”

“Despite increasing truck deaths and record-breaking vehicle recalls, S. 1732 is a safety mirage. It appears to address serious safety problems but a closer examination shows that automakers and trucking companies have escaped stronger accountability for their deceptive and dangerous behavior. This is a charade on American families who are riding in defective vehicles on roads with unsafe trucks and expect our federal lawmakers to implement sensible safety solutions. S. 1743 and S. 1739 include numerous measures advancing auto and truck safety that will ensure responsible corporate conduct and consumer protections,” said Joan Claybrook, Chair, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH) and former NHTSA Administrator. “For example, S. 1732 ignores industry actions to purposely cover up faulty GM ignition switches and exploding Takata airbags, leaves in place the meager \$35 million maximum fine, makes no change in penalties for corporate wrongdoing and fails to provide adequate funding to implement the urgent reforms identified by countless congressional hearings and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report.”

Jennifer Tierney, North Carolina Volunteer Coordinator for the Truck Safety Coalition, stated, “The proposed overhaul in S. 1732 of the DOT program which creates ‘scorecards’ on the performance of motor carrier companies in seven categories under the Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) Program, does more to protect unsafe motor carriers than to protect public safety. The bill includes provisions that will shield information about unsafe trucking companies and passenger-carrying buses from public review and accountability. It will also tie the hands of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to take them off the road.”

“Every year millions of consumers are renting cars with the expectation that they will not be given a vehicle that has a deadly safety defect and has not yet been repaired. It is critically important for rental car companies to get recalled vehicles fixed before they offer them to the unsuspecting public,” stated Jack Gillis, Director of Public Affairs, Consumer Federation of America. “Unfortunately, S. 1732 allows rental car companies to delay repairs and creates a treacherous loophole that can be hidden in the fine print of the rental contract.”

In contrast, S. 1743, introduced by Senate Commerce Committee Ranking Member Bill Nelson (D-FL), Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), proposes numerous provisions that will result in important improvements in motor vehicle safety by directing U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) actions on overdue rulemakings, improving consumer protections, and increasing fines and penalties for automakers who purposely mislead consumers and hide safety defects. The bill makes important upgrades to consumer access to safety information, provides criminal penalties for corporate wrongdoing and stops used cars dealers from selling a recalled vehicle that has not been repaired.

In addition to providing much needed resources for NHTSA’s safety programs, S. 1743 empowers NHTSA to take swift action when a vehicle defect that poses an imminent hazard is identified, requires dramatic

improvements in NHTSA databases, and overhauls aspects of the agency's Early Warning Reporting system. Other measures included in the bill would direct NHTSA to conduct a rulemaking to improve the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists who are being needlessly killed and injured when struck by a car. The bill directs NHTSA to create a standard for the hoods and bumpers of cars so they are more forgiving in collisions. Another measure would direct NHTSA action on a safety research initiative and rulemaking into possible technological solutions to prevent the tragic deaths of children who are accidentally left behind in cars by caretakers.

S. 1739, motor carrier safety legislation sponsored by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), will move the bar to advance commercial motor vehicle safety. With total tonnage of truck freight shipments predicted to increase by as much as 63 percent by 2040, requiring advanced crash avoidance technology in trucks is crucial. While nearly every truck manufacturer currently offers some type of Forward Collision Avoidance and Mitigation Braking System (F-CAM) system on new vehicles, there is no national standard for F-CAM system performance and not all buyers purchase this safety option. Federal regulatory action has previously expedited the installation of critical vehicle safety advances, such as airbags and Electronic Stability Control (ESC) systems, by requiring these safety systems as standard equipment rather than as expensive options. Additionally, the bill requires DOT to issue a speed limiter requirement for trucks. Federal regulation remains the best and most effective means to ensure the latest safety advances reach the majority of the traveling public.

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