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August 5, 2022

Dr. Stephen Cliff
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Dr. Cliff,

I am extremely troubled that the large blind zones in front of SUVs are reportedly resulting in the senseless deaths of children. In such instances, called 'frontovers,' tragedy strikes because the child is in front of the car but is not visible above the car's hood and no warning occurs, leading drivers to accidentally run over children. I have long made clear that even one death of a child is one too many. I write to inquire about the steps the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is taking to collect information about and stop these preventable frontover tragedies.

Neither the dangers posed by frontovers nor possible solutions are new. A 2019 demonstration found the blind zone in front of a large SUV to be fifteen feet; another demonstration publicized last week found a comparable blind zone size of sixteen feet.¹ A blind zone of this size is simply astonishing. And several solutions to mitigate this blind zone have been suggested over the years, including front cameras or other detection technologies. When confronting a rear blind zone that caused countless, tragic backover incidents, Congress mandated in 2007 that NHTSA issue a rule on rear visibility standards with the intention of decreasing backover deaths.² A similar, simple solution of front visibility standards could help prevent these deaths. Moreover, a number of car manufacturers already offer models equipped with this technology, but they offer it only on their more expensive, upgraded models or for an additional fee.³ Safety is not – and should never be – a premium feature only available to those who can afford it; it should be the default.

¹ Bob Segall, "13 Investigates: Millions of vehicles have unexpected, dangerous front blind zone," *WTHR*, April 25, 2019, <https://www.wthr.com/article/news/investigations/13-investigates/13-investigates-millions-vehicles-have-unexpected-dangerous-front-blind-zone/531-9521c471-3bc1-4b55-b860-3363f0954b3b>; Susan Hogan et al., "Driveway Danger: Kids Being Injured and Killed in 'Frontover' SUV Blind Zone Incidents," *NBC Washington*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/driveway-danger-kids-being-injured-and-killed-in-frontover-suv-blind-zone-incident/3119237/>.

² The full rule went into effect in 2018, but NHTSA has not yet released data to verify its effectiveness.

³ Joel Patel, "360° Car Cameras: A Must-Have Feature," *Carfax*, December 8, 2021, <https://www.carfax.com/blog/360-car-camera>.

Public accessibility to NHTSA's own data about frontovers is also lacking. Despite the requirement to publish non-traffic incident data biennially, the last publication of a non-traffic surveillance data summary was in 2018, and it only covered data through 2015 and did not explicitly identify frontovers.⁴ The latest underlying non-traffic surveillance data is even more out-of-date: the data was last updated in 2015 and only covers incidents occurring through 2011.⁵ This more-than-a-decade lag in the release of this crash data is simply unacceptable. Recent, updated data is critical to understanding the true scope of frontovers and the steps that can be taken to prevent these unnecessary and tragic incidents.

I respectfully request a written answer to the following questions by August 26, 2022:

1. How many frontover incidents is NHTSA aware of since 2015? Please provide the injury and fatality data for each year.
2. When does NHTSA plan to make its non-traffic surveillance (NTS) data through 2020 publically available?
3. Is NHTSA confident that the NTS data system is capturing the full scope of injuries and fatalities caused by frontover collisions?
4. What steps has NHTSA taken any towards reduction and prevention of frontovers? If none, please explain why not.
5. What additional authorities or resources, if any, does NHTSA require to adequately address frontovers?

Thank you for your attention this important matter. I look forward to working with you to address frontovers.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

⁴ Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, Pub. L. No. 109-59, 119 Stat. 1941; Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act of 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-189, 122 Stat. 639; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Non-Traffic Surveillance: Fatality and Injury Statistics in Non-Traffic Crashes in 2015," <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/Publication/812515> (accessed August 3, 2022).

⁵ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "NHTSA File Downloads," <https://www.nhtsa.gov/file-downloads?p=nhtsa/downloads/NTS/> (accessed August 3, 2022).