

CONGRESS

## Senator plans to grill regulators over backover law delays



*By David McCumber*

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said he plans to hold a hearing to call federal bureaucrats accountable for delays in issuing regulations compelling automakers to help drivers see behind their vehicles.

The Houston Chronicle published a special report Sunday examining the alarming number of children hurt in back-over accidents. Every week, an average of nearly 40 children younger than age 5 are injured in these accidents. On average, two die. Most are run over by a relative, often a parent.

Congress passed a bill in 2008 that gave the U.S. Department of Transportation three years to develop a safety standard. Since then, the issuance of the standard — which could include mandating backup cameras in all vehicles — has been repeatedly delayed by federal officials amid lobbying pressure from the auto industry.

Blumenthal, a Democrat from Connecticut who sits on the Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee that deals with safety, said he was planning to hold a second hearing on the issue. The first, in July, heard safety advocates. The next, in October or November, will seek testimony from transportation department regulators.

“DOT has unconscionably delayed a rear visibility standard that can save thousands of children every year from car backover accidents causing injury and death,” Blumenthal said. “This delay is outrageous and unacceptable.”

### **Challenges Obama**

He said backup cameras should be a basic safety feature like airbags and seatbelts, not a luxury like a sunroof or stereo.

“The bottom line is, they are a lifesaving feature,” Blumenthal said.

The senator said he would like to see President Barack Obama crack down on the transportation department and order it to promulgate a standard.

Meanwhile, auto-safety advocates filed a lawsuit Wednesday against the transportation agency, asking the court to force regulators to issue a rule mandating backup cameras as standard equipment in new cars.

“The agency announced another two-year delay just months ago. DOT is quite literally breaking the law,” Blumenthal said. “Perhaps this lawsuit is what is needed to make DOT finally realize that there are human costs to bureaucratic failure.”

### **No comment from feds**

Transportation Department spokesman Nathan Naylor declined comment, referring inquiries to the Department of Justice, which will represent the agency in the lawsuit. Allison Price, a Justice spokeswoman, said the government would decline to comment.

The suit was filed in the 2nd Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York state by a group including Consumers Union, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, and Kids and Cars Inc., which are being represented in the action by Public Citizen.

Also among the plaintiffs are Susan Auriemma, of Manhasset, N.Y., who backed over her 3-year-old daughter Kate, injuring her, in 2005; and Dr. Greg Gulbransen, of Syosset, N.Y., who backed over his 2-year-old son Cameron in his driveway in 2002, killing him.

### **Physician’s anguish**

Gulbransen, 50, is a pediatrician. He was quoted in the Chronicle story as saying, “I go to work and I tell everybody about vaccines, growth and development issues, and baby-proofing ... and make sure all my patients have car seats. And then I go and back over my kid. Are you kidding me? Are you absolutely kidding me? How the hell?”

Months after his son’s death, Gulbransen reached out to Kids and Cars and began to push for better visibility behind vehicles.

The law mandating the safety standard, introduced by Rep. Peter King of New York, was named for Cameron.

But the auto industry has fought the proposal, citing “significant additional costs” and other concerns, and has lobbied the transportation department to delay implementation of the rule mandated under law.

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