



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

STATEMENT OF
Cathy Chase, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety,
In Support of the Hot Cars Act of 2021

Good morning. I am Cathy Chase, President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, an alliance of consumer, medical, public health, law enforcement, and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to improve road safety in the U.S. Thank you to everyone joining us today to announce the reintroduction of the Hot Cars Act by Representatives Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL).

At a time when we are facing so many challenges, threats and dangers that lack clear solutions, our nation's leaders should be taking swift action on easily solveable problems. Children either left unknowingly in a car or climbing into one without anyone knowing is a preventable problem, and the Hot Cars Act provides a proven solution. Quite simply, it directs the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue a rule requiring new cars to be equipped with technology to detect the presence of a child in a car and send alerts. Today we will be showing a short video with examples of this tech in action.

Requiring technology to protect people in and around cars is not a new concept. Seat belts, airbags, roof crush standards are just a few examples – and in fact, they are the ones that recently, famously saved the life of Tiger Woods. Unfortunately, auto manufacturers opposing sensible regulations is also not new. It's time for the auto industry to stop its stalling tactics and get behind this bill. As they push for an autonomous vehicle bill, certainly they could and should support the Hot Cars bill which pales in comparison in terms of the complexities of the technological systems.

As the strains of the pandemic hopefully begin to ease, routines will change for many. This combined with warmer spring and summer weather will bring an increased risk of hot car deaths. We must get this bill passed now to end the suffering of families losing their children in hot cars incidents.

Today we will be hearing from the sponsors of the Hot Cars Act, Congressman Tim Ryan of Ohio, and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky of Illinois, who chairs of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce. Also speaking today will be: Dr. Norman Collins Senior, who lost his grandson Norman Lee Van Collins III at just 3-months of age in a hot car incident; Dr. Andrew and Jamie Dill of Evansville, Indiana, who lost their 3-year-old son Oliver; Dr. David Diamond, Professor of Psychology at the University of South Florida; and, Janette Fennell, President and Founder of Kids and Car Safety.

Once we have heard from all of our speakers, we will play the video of the technology and then we are glad to take questions from the press. Please post your questions using the chat function.



Statement of Janette Fennell, President and Founder, Kids and Cars Safety

In Support of the Hot Cars Act of 2021

I hope everyone enjoyed hearing from our speakers to better understand how and why these tragedies continue to happen. The positive news we saw in the video montage of different available technologies is so exciting because you've just seen the answer to how these deaths and injuries can be prevented.

We live in an ever-changing world, and the 2020 pandemic taught us to learn how to do things differently. In fact, we are communicating via Zoom today because this is how we are doing business these days. While everyone was locked down last year, schools and childcare centers closed & one would think that hot car deaths would end. That did NOT happen. The number of deaths last year did go down to 25, but it certainly shouldn't take a pandemic to prevent hot car deaths.

While so many children were at home last year, many of the hot car deaths were due to children getting into vehicles on their own. It is vital that the technology installed in vehicles can detect the presence of a child or pet if they are unknowingly left behind or gain access to a vehicle on their own. The Hot Cars Act will make that happen. It's really all about utilizing and perfecting the resources we already have to save innocent lives.

I know you have heard from almost every speaker that since 1990 almost 1000 children have died in hot cars. That's not just a number. It's the suffering of hundreds of families and communities simply trying to endure the unimaginable. Take a moment to imagine 1,000 children in front of you right now. Now imagine all of their parents, siblings, extended family members, caregivers and loved ones. Now imagine all of the EMS workers, police officers, doctors, nurses and reporters who were directly impacted by their tragedy. This number becomes exponential. What makes this pain cut even deeper is that we know that solutions currently exist to prevent these deaths.

The other pandemic outcome we have wrestled with is the importance of SCIENCE in our world. How many people truly understand that one of the main reasons hot car deaths continue simply has to do with brain science? We certainly wish we could train our memories to 'never forget,' but this is a very human condition we all live with. Dr. Diamond has studied how our memories work for over 30 years and he is able to articulate exactly how this takes place. Nobody in this world has an infallible memory. This is not bad parenting, this is not a crime, this is a public health issue that we all must work together to end.

Safety is something every family deserves. It shouldn't be an option. And it shouldn't be political. The federal government, our legislators, automakers along with safety advocates have the ability to solve this problem. Yet, our government and industry has shamefully remained complacent about the children who continue to die from something so utterly preventable.

We need to make sure that Congress mandates a detection and alarm system to save the lives of our children and eliminate the crushing pain that this causes their families through no fault of their own.

We know technology works. It is sitting on a shelf somewhere waiting to save lives. Today, technology saves your car battery. Tomorrow, it could save your child. WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

Thank you for joining us today. You can find more information about the Hot Cars Act including the press release and other information about hot car deaths on our website. KidsAndCars.org

Statement from Dr. David Diamond, Professor in the Departments of Psychology, Molecular Pharmacology and Physiology at the University of South Florida in support of the Hot Cars Act

A Scientific Perspective on Why Parents Forget Children in Cars

I have been studying the brain and memory for almost 40 years. The challenge I am faced with as a scientist is to explain how loving and attentive parents can forget a child in their car, rendering the child vulnerable to develop brain damage or to die from heatstroke when the car becomes dangerously hot. In addition to leaving the child in the car, what is baffling to people is how a parent can go about their routine activities for an entire day, unaware their child remained unattended in their car. The public, the authorities, and even the parents themselves, are all bewildered as to why anyone would unknowingly leave a child in a car.

I have studied fatal memory errors involving children in cars for the past 12 years. With the aid of data collection from KidsAndCars.org, I have learned that hundreds of children in the US and around the world have died or suffered brain damage as a result of being unknowingly left in a hot car. With this substantial database, as well as my own interviews with parents that have forgotten children in cars, I have identified several common features of the fatal day's events. The one aspect which is not a factor is that these children were not forgotten by parents that were reckless with regard to care for their children. This phenomenon must be explained from a brain science perspective, not one that blames parents for being negligent.

The first thing to point out is that the brain is composed of many different structures, and each structure has a different function. Two brain structures, called the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex (PFC), work together to enable us to plan to do something in the future. For example, they enable us to make the following plan when we leave home: Today, unlike most days, I'm planning on leaving home with my child, I'll drop off my child at daycare and then I'll go to work. Another brain structure, called the basal ganglia, also helps us to get to work, but it relies entirely on well-established habits. The basal ganglia has the capacity to function at a subconscious level to take us from one place to another, almost without thinking about it. When the basal ganglia is activated we function in an "auto-pilot" mode, as we follow well established routes with minimal thought. The basal ganglia, therefore, can become engaged during a drive to generate a "habit memory" which automatically and subconsciously takes a parent on a commonly driven route.

We know from experimental studies that brain structures engage in a form of competition, in which the hippocampus/PFC system attempts to remind us what is different about today (go to daycare) but this system can be outcompeted by the basal ganglia, which attempts to take us on a route that has been followed many times before, but one that does not include going to the daycare. This type of phenomenon is actually very common, usually with little consequence. For example, we may have the plan to stop at the store on the way home from work (using our hippocampus/PFC), but somewhere en-route, the basal ganglia takes charge, directing us to go directly home, and in the process, produces a complete loss of awareness of the person's original plan to stop at the store along the way.

In the dozens of cases I have studied in which children are left in cars it appears that the basal ganglia of these parents outcompeted the hippocampus/PFC system to suppress their awareness of the presence of their children in the cars.

Two factors that bias the basal ganglia to outcompete the hippocampus/PFC system are stress and sleep deprivation. It is commonly reported that on the day a child is forgotten, a stressed and sleep-deprived parent intended to follow a route to daycare, but somewhere along the drive the basal ganglia redirected the parent to drive a commonly driven route that did not include the stop at daycare. Therefore, the neurobiological basis for why parents forget children in cars is the dominance of the basal ganglia, which suppresses the hippocampus/PFC system, causing the parent to lose awareness of the child in the car as it directed the parent to drive straight to work, instead of to daycare.

It is also important to point out that these parents commonly report events of the day, including talking about their child with co-workers, and that they had to leave work on time to pick up their child from daycare. All the while, they were

completely unaware their child had remained in the hot car all day. This occurs because the brain created the false memory that their plan to take the child to daycare had been accomplished.

Therefore, they went about their normal daily activities because they believed their child was at daycare.

There is no doubt that competition between brain memory systems in normal, attentive parents is the basis of why children have been forgotten in cars. When the basal ganglia out competes the hippocampus/PFC system we subconsciously make fatal memory errors. This is a phenomenon that occurs without awareness in the best of parents.

Therefore, we must have a system that provides a reminder to parents of the presence of their child in the backseat for that rare occasion when a child's life is in danger because parents, through no fault of their own, lose awareness of the presence of their child in the car.

Statement of Dr. Andrew Dill in support of the Hot Cars Act

June 9th, 2019. It was the day my wife, Jamie, and I lost our baby boy, Oliver “Ollie” Dill. That morning we decided to take our kids to see *Toy Story 4*. She usually dropped Ollie off at daycare but had decided to stay home and pack for our upcoming family vacation. Instead, I took Ollie to his daycare before going to my office.

My day at work was rather uneventful. As I was finishing for the day, I received a call from Jamie stating that we would soon need to leave for the movie. She also said that the daycare app used to document what Ollie ate for lunch reflected that he was not in attendance that day. I assured Jamie that I left Oliver at daycare and simply forgot to sign him in, which was not unusual.

I drove to the daycare and, before entering the building, decided to organize the straps on Oliver’s car seat to make it easier for me to buckle him in. That is when I saw his lifeless body. I cannot even begin to describe the horror of seeing your child, the object of your highest, unconditional love, dead because you forgot him in a car on a hot day.

If you have not already, you will soon read about another child dying in a manner similar to my son. I am confident in saying this because there has been almost 1000 hot car deaths since 1990. I had heard of parents unknowingly leaving their children in cars but never imagined it would happen to us. Never thought it happened to responsible parents until it happened with Ollie. I have learned this happens to the most loving parents. The ones that carefully plan a nursery when they are expecting; the ones that are always worried about safety.

After over 20 years of educating the public on this issue, and with awareness at an all-time high, the number of children dying in hot cars continues to rise. Education and awareness are not enough. Technology in all vehicles is critical to prevent hot car tragedies. The Hot Cars Act is a commonsense bill that requires the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue a final rule regarding the inclusion of a system that can detect the presence of a child and send a warning to the driver as standard equipment in all vehicles. Such reminder systems in cars already exist for several components such as headlights, keys, seatbelts, and doors.

We will never see Ollie go to school, graduate, get married, or have children. We will never know what he wanted to be when he grows up. Never see him play baseball the way he yearned to do while watching his big brother. We don’t want any more families to experience the horrific and painful loss so many families are currently living with today. As such, we urge the passage of the Hot Cars Act to prevent children from needlessly dying when left alone in vehicles.

I cannot think of an endeavor more noble than saving the lives of children. This is an opportunity for our elected leaders to do just that. It has been said that the moral measure of a society is how well it treats its most vulnerable populations. We, the people, are trusting our elected officials to help our children, our future.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of the Hot Cars Act.

Statement by Norman L. Collins, Sr., PhD in support of the Hot Cars Act

May 29, 2011 is a date that is etched in the chronicle of times in the hearts of me and my family.

It is the day when I received a phone call from a church friend who informed me that my son, Norman II, needed me to come to Clarksdale, Mississippi, right away because something had happened to my 3-month old grandson, Norman Collins III who was affectionately known as “Bishop.” After several more frantic phone calls, I eventually received word that our dear Bishop was dead, the victim of heatstroke after being unknowingly left in his parents’ hot car in a church parking lot on a 93-degree Sunday afternoon, due to a miscommunication. Grief-stricken, all I could remember was the pain in my heart not felt since I witnessed the death of my mother 10 years earlier. The daily horror I and my family encounter at the thought of Bishop being buckled in his car seat, crying relentlessly, sweating profusely, seizing uncontrollably and extending his little arms for help with no one to attend to him – at times it is simply too much to bear for any human.

As one would imagine, the days since Bishop’s death have not been easy, but they’ve yielded several positives, including bringing to the forefront the need to [build awareness and prevention of child safety in and around cars.](#)

Yes, Bishop’s death was tragic and unintentional. It was the result of confusion and misunderstanding between two people.

Many people don’t understand that a simple miscommunication can result in the death of a child in a hot car. Sometimes Mom thinks Dad brought the baby in the the house from the car and vice-versa. If either person thinks the baby is napping in their crib, it can be too late before the ramifications of a simple miscommunication is found. In our tragedy, the person who was asked to take the baby into the childcare center at church had misunderstood the communication. It wasn’t until after services had ended and his parents went to pick him up from childcare were the ramifications of that simple miscommunications known.

I have thought so many times how inexpensive and effective technology would have saved our dear Bishop and countless others. Living with this hole in my heart is only deeper because we know it was totally preventable. Life would be so different today for our entire family if we would have received an alert that precious little Bishop had been left in the car.

For this reason, I call upon our lawmaking government officials to assist in the effort by supporting and passing the Hot Cars Act to save lives and avoid any more families having to endure the lifelong horror of grief that ours and so many other families have encountered due to the preventable tragedies of hot car deaths. Please help us to turn our pain into power, our tragedy into triumph, and our agony into positive action.

We all have a God-given right, responsibility, and reason to protect our children as well as each other. Whereas we cannot change what happened to our precious boy Bishop and the almost 1000 children who died from heatstroke since 1990, as advocates, parents, teachers, rescuers, and legislators, we must pass the Hot Cars Act immediately.

I challenge each person here today and around the United States to help us by working together and pledge to never stop talking, to never stop raising awareness and to never stop working to require technology in all vehicles to make hot car deaths a thing of the past. Thank you.