



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
AND AUTO SAFETY



For Immediate Release:

May 16, 2007

Contact: Janette Fennell, KIDS AND CARS (913) 327-0013  
Sally Greenburg, Consumers Union (202) 462-6262  
Jeremy Gunderson, Advocates (202) 408-1711  
Angela Bradbery, Public Citizen (202) 588-7741

## **Child Safety Advocates and Consumer Groups Applaud Senate Committee Action Today to Stop Deaths and Injuries of Children Due to Motor Vehicle Design Flaws**

### ***Legislation Sponsored by Senators Clinton and Sununu Clears Committee Hurdle***

Child safety advocates and consumer groups applauded today's action in the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee to move legislation to protect children from being injured or killed in non-traffic automobile incidents. S. 694, the Cameron Gulbransen KIDS AND CARS Safety Act of 2007, directs the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to advance federal safety standards to address rear blind zones, dangerous power windows that can strangle small children, and vehicles that can be knocked into gear because they lack a brake transmission shift interlock.

Two years ago Sen. Clinton (D-NY) became alarmed at the number of children dying in New York because of rear blind zones. The legislation is named after the 2-year-old son of a constituent, Dr. Greg Gulbransen from Long Island, New York, who was backed over on his own driveway because of poor rearward visibility. She partnered with Sen. John E. Sununu (R-NH) who was affected by a New Hampshire constituent, Packy Campbell, whose son was killed when his vehicle rolled over him after slipping out of gear because it was not equipped with brake shift transmission interlock technology. Together, they introduced legislation in the last session of Congress but it failed to be enacted. Currently, there are more than 25 Democratic and Republican co-sponsors of S. 694 reintroduced in February 2007.

"Every week at least four children needlessly die in and around cars, said Janette Fennell, president of KIDS AND CARS. "This important child safety legislation will stem the tide of future tragedies. April was the deadliest month in over three years with 17 children dying in back over incidents. We simply cannot wait any longer while the death toll grows. We know this is a serious problem, we have the technology to solve it and we commend the Senate Commerce Committee for moving forward," she added.

Since 2000, over 1,100 children have died in non-traffic incidents, with 219 in 2006 alone. Back-over incidents have increased dramatically claiming the lives of 474 children from 2002-2006 compared to 128 from 1997-2001. Backovers now account for half of all non-traffic fatalities involving children. The federal government does not collect data about non-traffic incidents, so the actual fatality numbers are likely much higher.

A 2002 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that over 9,100 children are treated in hospital emergency rooms due to non-traffic incidents in a one-year time period.

"Consumers Union has documented the difficulty of seeing small children and toddlers, especially behind the family's SUV, using cones the size of an average two-year-old and having drivers try to see behind them. Some blind zones have measured as long as 69 feet, longer than most driveways," said Sally Greenberg, senior attorney at Consumers Union, the publisher of *Consumer Reports* magazine. "In one demonstration, 62 small children behind a large SUV could go unseen in these blind zones. That's a tragedy waiting to happen."

“We applaud Senators Clinton and Sununu and the leaders of the Senate Commerce Committee, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) for making this legislation a top priority and pushing this bill one step closer to enactment. This was a model of bi-partisan cooperation,” said Jackie Gillan, vice president, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

Joan Claybrook, president, Public Citizen and former Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration testified before the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on child vehicle safety on February 28, 2007. In response to the Committee’s action today, Claybrook stated, “Deadly blind zones, power windows and vehicles rolling away put children’s lives at risk. The auto industry already is offering this safety technology on many high-end vehicles and it should be standard equipment so that every child is protected in every vehicle.”

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Rep. Peter King (R-NY) also have introduced legislation directing DOT to act. According to Janette Fennell, "There is strong bi-partisan support in the House of Representatives for addressing these safety issues. I know it is a priority for House Members to enact legislation as quickly as possible. Safety groups and parents are fortunate to have such great leaders in both the House and Senate championing our issues."

The bill, as approved by the Commerce Committee, would address the following:

Power Windows:

- Directs the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to begin a rulemaking within 18 months of enactment on the need to require power windows and panels to automatically reverse direction if there is an obstruction in the path of a motor vehicle window or panel;
- NHTSA will determine whether a final rule shall be issued within 30 months of enactment. If NHTSA decides not to issue a final rule to require automatic reversal of power windows and panels in motor vehicles, NHTSA must
  - report to Congress the reasons for not issuing a final rule; and,
  - publish information about which vehicles are or are not equipped with automatic reversal of power windows and panels in motor vehicles on the internet and other means (such as the NCAP “Buying a Safer Car” brochure).

Rearward Visibility:

- Requires NHTSA to begin rulemaking within 12 months of enactment to amend FMVSS Standard No. 111, Rearward Visibility;
- NHTSA must issue a final rule within 36 months of enactment;

Preventing Vehicle Roll-Away:

- Motor vehicles equipped with an automatic transmission must have a brake transmission shift interlock on and after September 1, 2010;
- Each year prior to September 1, 2010, NHTSA must publish or make available on the internet the makes and models of motor vehicles with automatic transmissions that do not have a brake transmission shift interlock;

Nontraffic, Noncrash Injury Database:

- NHTSA must establish database for nontraffic, noncrash motor vehicle injuries within 6 months of enactment;

Child Safety Information Program:

- NHTSA must establish a consumer information program on nontraffic, noncrash hazards to children within 6 months of enactment.

###