

## Statement by Pamela Cestia

**Mother of Thomas Cestia who died in a hot car on June 14, 2021**

**Press Conference: Grieving Families, Members of Congress, Kids and Car Safety and Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety Call for Immediate Action to End Hot Car Tragedies (May 1, 2023)**

June 14, 2021, I received a call you never want to receive. My husband, Tyler, was frantic and stating he didn't drop Thomas off at our babysitter. That morning, he had put Thomas in his car seat, and Thomas napped on the way to the sitter as normal. Tyler went to work to prepare for a 3-year audit and give a safety presentation on heat exhaustion.

He completed the 3-year audit, and took the auditor to lunch at a local restaurant. After lunch, they returned to the office. On both rides to and from the restaurant, neither my husband or the auditor looked in the back seat. Around 1:50, a thought crossed Tyler's mind: He didn't remember seeing the babysitter that morning. He ran to his truck, and found Thomas in his car seat unresponsive and motionless. I can only imagine the thoughts and heartache running through his mind in those moments.

He asks himself every day, how does this tragic accident occur to a father who loves his son immensely?



As difficult as it has been, Tyler has accepted full responsibility for the tragic accident. However, there are always preventions that can be utilized to help future parents and caretakers. Thomas died in a 2020 GMC Sierra 4-door pick up truck. The truck had what is called a "rear seat reminder" alert. Prior to Thomas's death, we believed that the rear seat reminder alert dealt with the actual seats. The 'rear seat reminder' detects the opening of the rear door of a vehicle, NOT a child.

The day Thomas died, Tyler drove his truck 3 times and never once heard an alert to remind him that our son was in the back seat. The alert didn't catch his attention that morning. During his trip to and from lunch with the auditor, the reminder never went off because the back door was never opened. The system failed again to protect my son.

The truck gave many false alarms, meaning the back seat reminder went off when we did not have our children in the truck. Also, the alarm would not alert if one of our boys had climbed in their car seats from the front seats. As parents we were not aware of exactly how the technology worked. The current technology cannot detect the difference between opening the back door for a child, or putting groceries in the car. Our concern is other families will have a false sense of security with these misleading systems.

We need technology that can detect children in vehicles and alert others of the whereabouts to prevent hot car tragedies.

Today, I am calling on the Biden Administration, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to ensure that the hot car final rule is issued by November of this year as required by law.

It is imperative that the final rule issued by NHTSA includes occupant detection so that families do not have to live through this horror. Occupant detection systems are readily available to automakers and they are cost effective. Children do not have to die in hot cars, but these tragedies will continue to devastate families until vehicles can detect children to protect children.

Nobody thinks this can happen to them until it does. This is why we need technology in all vehicles.

My family has been forever changed by something we still cannot understand or comprehend. I will spend the rest of my life wondering who would Thomas be today? What would he be into? Would he still be interested in giving mommy kisses?

Thank you for hearing our story and for being here to show your commitment to being a part of the solution.