



# INSIDE

# ITS

Intelligent Transportation Systems Update for North America

## ITS AND SAFETY

# Safety advocates line up backing for technology law

**Eighteen senators support legislation that would set a rearward visibility performance standard; more than 10,000 people sign an online petition. Kids and Cars reported last month that at least 29 children died in 30 days in nontraffic vehicular incidents. Active ITS systems are considered a key preventive measure.**

Child safety advocates are pressing for passage of federal legislation that would put safety technology in new vehicles. More than 10,000 people have signed an online petition, as of the middle of last month, urging lawmakers to take action on the legislation and Janette Fennell, president of Kids and Cars, says two more Senators, Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., have signed on as co-sponsors, bringing the total number of sponsoring senators to 18.

The proposed legislation covers rear visibility, power window obstacle sensors, brake shift interlocks, and a child safety information program.

Consumers Union is sponsoring the online petition, titled We Need Better Car Safety for Kids, and has set a goal of 20,000 signatures.

"The technology exists that can save children's lives at relatively low cost and new innovations are being developed all the time," said Senator

Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., at a rally earlier this year.

Clinton and Senator John Sununu, R-N.H., introduced Senate bill S.1948 and Representatives Peter King, R-N.Y., and Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., introduced a companion bill, House bill H.R. 2230, last year. The legislation is titled the Cameron Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act of 2005; it is named after a child who died in a backing up accident in a family driveway in 2002.

**"The technology exists that can save children's lives at relatively low cost."**

"We're aggressively moving forward because we want to make sure it gets passed this [legislative] session," Fennell says. As of June 15, Kids and Cars had documented at least 29 child fatalities in a period of

30 days and 96 fatalities since the beginning of the year due to nontraffic incidents involving vehicles.

### Nontraffic incident data collection

The legislation carries forward provisions in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) that cover power window safety; collection of data for nontraffic accidents that occur on private property, such as driveways and parking lots; and the evaluation of technologies that prevent children and adults from being backed over.

The SAFETEA-LU provisions responded to advocacy efforts brought into focus by a National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report in 2002 on accidents involving children and vehicles that are not in traffic. The CDC reviewed reports from hospital emergency rooms for a one-year period and estimated that 9,160 children aged 14 years and younger suffered nonfatal injuries occurring in or around vehicles that were not in traffic. In addition, using data from Kids and Cars, the CDC said that at least 78 children died from such accidents during the same time period (see *Inside ITS* Online, Aug. 15, 2002).

One of the problems has been lack of data on nontraffic vehicular incidents. Both the Senate and the House bills fill this void by requiring the establishment and maintenance of

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a database of injuries and deaths in nontraffic, noncrash events involving passenger motor vehicles, and the establishment of a consumer information program about the problem.

“As we learn more about this — as NHTSA [National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration] finally starts gathering the data — we may find, as a country, that children are in more danger in their own driveway or parking lot than they are as a passenger in a motor vehicle,” Fennell says.

### **Rear visibility performance standard**

Both the Senate and House bills call for NHTSA to establish a rearward visibility performance standard “in order to prevent backing incidents involving death and injury especially to small children and disabled persons.” The House bill says the standard “will provide drivers with an unobstructed view of the area behind the vehicle,” while the Senate bill describes a more active approach that would probably involve ITS. The Senate bill says the standard should “provide drivers with a means for detecting the presence of a person or

object behind the vehicle.”

Fennell says car manufacturers could address a rear visibility standard by a number of measures, including mirrors and bigger or lower back windows, as well as sensors and cameras. “NHTSA could put together the standard and then everyone could meet it in the way they feel appropriate,” she says.

She notes that *Automotive News* declared backup cameras/audible warning devices to be one of the “10 hot technologies” at the beginning of this year. *Consumer Reports* says its testing has shown that rear-view video cameras when used regularly can be effective in reducing backover accidents.

Both the Senate and House bills call for auto reverse functionality in power windows when the windows encounter an obstacle. This provision would carry a recent NHTSA ruling a step further. In April, complying with a SAFETEA-LU requirement and responding to petitions, NHTSA banned power window rocker and toggle switches and required the use of pull-up or pull-out switches, but declined to mandate auto reverse technology.

The Senate bill contains provision mandating a safety interlock, meaning that a foot has to be on the brake before a gear can be engaged. Fennell says safety interlock is commonly thought to be standard on all cars, but, in fact, it is not and rollaway vehicles are still a problem.

The House bill does not have a provision for a safety interlock but has a requirement for a driver reminder system if passengers remain in the rear seats after the ignition switch is in the off position — a provision designed to prevent hyperthermia.

Fennell notes that the cost of complying with a rear visibility standard would vary by the type of approach. Kids and Cars estimates that putting a rear-facing camera on every vehicle might cost about \$200. It estimates that a reverse power window capability would cost \$8 to \$10 per window and a brake shift interlock would cost \$5 or less per vehicle.

*S.1948 and H.R. 2230 can be accessed at <http://thomas.loc.gov> and at [www.kidsandcars.org](http://www.kidsandcars.org). The Consumers Union petition is at [www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/982684985](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/982684985). **ITS***



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