



June 30, 2022

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We are writing to you because of the urgency of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) taking immediate action to protect young children and spare parents the heartbreak of losing a child. This week, another young child was killed by heatstroke when the father unknowingly left his 18-month-old son in the backseat. This tragedy was compounded when the father took his own life after discovering his dead son. We are writing to you as family members who also have experienced the devastating loss of a child to heatstroke in a vehicle, and many of us considered doing the same. Fortunately, we were immediately surrounded by professionals and loved ones in the aftermath to help us deal with our unimaginable grief.

This needless death in Chesterfield County, VA adds another young victim to the climbing death toll of over 1,000 children who have died in hot cars the United States since 1990. As a recent father, you must share concern about this deadly problem. However, as Secretary of Transportation, you have the unique ability to prevent this deadly problem. We urge you to issue a standard before next summer that requires every new vehicle to be equipped with available and affordable technology that both “detects and alerts” others to the presence of a child in a vehicle. Anything less, will fail to prescribe the optimal technological solution and protect every child in every vehicle.

There are several critical reasons why a rudimentary rear seat reminder alert based on door sequencing is inadequate and will put children at unacceptable and unnecessary risk.

1. This system does not detect a child in the vehicle but only informs the driver that a rear door was opened prior to driving.
2. Over 25% of hot car deaths involve a child who got into a car on their own. Reminder alerts with messages on the dashboard would do nothing whatsoever to protect vulnerable children. For example, if a child entered the vehicle through the rear hatch or front seat on their own the reminder system would offer no protection from harm or death.
3. Audio beeps and an icon on the dashboard are easily missed and/or misinterpreted by consumers.
4. Furthermore, drivers will likely get ‘alert fatigue’ from receiving numerous reminders anytime a rear door was opened, even if no child is present.

Tragically, one of the families who signed this letter lost their child in a GM truck that had a rear seat reminder alert. Tyler Cestia drove his truck three times the day his son died. The first trip, he heard no alert. The second and third trips the alert never went off because the rear door was never opened. Even the passenger in the front seat with him was completely unaware that the child was in the back seat. In short, a rear seat reminder failed to save his child’s life.

We have experienced enough pain and suffering in our lives. We don’t want others to share our lifelong grief. We can stop this now. Please use your leadership as Secretary of the DOT and your empathy as a parent to issue a standard requiring state-of-the-art detection and alert technology even before the statutory deadline required in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Sincerely,

The Kids and Car Safety Family Advocate Team:

Carol MacDonald (Staunton VA), grandmother of Robbie MacDonald who died at 3 years old in a hot car

Dalyce Franz (Las Vegas, NV) mother of Seth Franz who dies at 4 years old in a hot car

Deona Bien (Tucson, AZ), mother of Aslyn Ryan who died in a hot car while running errands with sitter

Leanna Simmons (Florence, AL) mother of Cooper Harris who died at 22 months old in a hot car

Lisa Berry (Huntsville, AL) mother & father of Lexi Berry who died at 2 years old in a hot car

Shannon Berry (Huntsville, AL) mother & father of Lexi Berry who died at 2 years old in a hot car

Dr. Norman Collins, Sr. (Raleigh, NC) grandfather of Norman Collins II ("Bishop") who died at 3 months-12 days old after being accidentally left in a hot car in a church parking lot.

Vibha Marks (Dallas, Texas) mother of Victoria Marks who died at 1 year old in a hot car.

Stephanie Pinon (Albuquerque, NM), mother of Jahzel M. Pinon who died at 2 years old in a hot car

Israel Pinon (Albuquerque, NM), mother of Jahzel M. Pinon who died at 2 years old in a hot car

Juan Rodriguez (New City, NY), Father of Luna and Phoenix who both died in a hot car at 1 year old

Kaprice Collins (Scottsdale, AZ) Friend of Charly Jones who died in a hot car

Jennifer Hilton (Ritzville, WA), mother of Chris who survived being left in a hot car

Melody Costello (Medina, OH) mother of 9 month who died in a hot car on July 29, 2002

Todd Costello (Medina, OH) father of 9 month who died in a hot car on July 29, 2002

Vanessa Goolsby (Miami, FL) mother of Micayla who died in a hot car in 2016

Michael Goolsby (Miami, FL) father of Micayla who died in a hot car in 2016

Marta Magellan (Miami, FL) grandmother of Sammy Joseph Schnall, who died in a hot car at just 1 year old

Erin Holley (Charleston SC) mother of Finn who survived being left in a hot car at five weeks old in 2017

Robin Gigger (Saint Leonard, MD), Mawmaw of Lee who died in a hot car at 12 months old

Nicole Engler (Oregon), daughter Remi lost due to hot car tragedy at 21 months

Peter Engler (Oregon), daughter Remi lost due to hot car tragedy at 21 months

Meagan Everett (Shreveport, LA), mother of Josiah Gene Everett who died in a hot car at 1 year old

Dr Andrew Dill (Evansville, IN), father of Oliver Dill who died at 3 years old in a hot car

Jamie Dill (Evansville, IN), mother of Oliver Dill who died at 3 years old in a hot car

Susan Morgan Cooper, Director of two documentaries on the tragic issue of child heatstroke deaths. The latest one ...Fatal Distraction

Stephanie Mitchell (St. Louis, MO), mother of Tate Mitchell who died 3 days after his first birthday when left unknowingly by his mother in a hot car

Clay Blackburn (Shreveport, LA) parents of Addyson who died in a hot car at 6 months old, dad forgot her in the backseat while he was at work

Delyla Blackburn (Shreveport, LA) parents of Addyson who died in a hot car at 6 months old, dad forgot her in the backseat while he was at work

Rachel Morris (Locust Grove, GA) mother of Savannah Morris who had a near miss in 2018 after being forgotten in a vehicle at a park

Scott Jones (Gilbert, AZ) father of Charlotte Jones who died at 3 years old in a hot car

Angela Jones (Gilbert, AZ) mother of Charlotte Jones who died at 3 years old in a hot car

Kristin Whitaker (Tampa, FL) mother of Lawson Whitaker who died at 2 years after he was undetected in the family vehicle during routine drop off at daycare

Marissa Rodriguez (New City, NY) mother of Luna and Phoenix, 1 year old twins who passed due to being left in a hot car

Kristina Wilcoxson (Midwest city, ok) mother of James Swindle who had a "near miss" in 2008

Fletcher Ross (Hickory, NC) father of Andrew who survived being left in a hot car.

Raymond Pryer Sr. (Houston, TX) Proud father of Raymond Darnell Pryer Jr. whom was left in a daycare bus on 7/19/2018 for 4 hours the temperature reached a 118 degrees he died of a Heatstroke which is preventable.

Dikeisha Whitlock-Pryer (Houston, TX) Proud mother of Raymond Darnell Pryer Jr. whom was left in a daycare bus on 7/19/2018 for 4 hours the temperature reached a 118 degrees he died of a Heatstroke which is preventable.

Stephanie Salvilla, (Orlando, FL), Mother of Gannon Werking who died July 23, 2009 at 5 months old in a hot car

Makia Wallace (Orlando, FL.) mother of Jace Lucas Leslie (21 months old) died on September 11, 2020 after being left in his caregiver car.

Chris and Trisha Nicolas (Bellwood, NE), parents of Weston Nicolas who died at 23 months old in a hot car

Mike Stanley (currently Alpharetta GA. death occurred in Evans, GA), father of Sydney Stanley who died at 6 years of age in a hot car

Jenny Stanley (currently Alpharetta GA. death occurred in Evans, GA), mother of Sydney Stanley who died at 6 years of age in a hot car

Jodie Edwards (Liberty Township, OH), mother of Jenna who died in a hot car at 11-months-old

Dr. Dennis Sierra (Miami, FL), father of Andres who died in a hot car

Amie Duemer (Lubbock, TX), mother of Josef Duemer who died in a hot car at 12 months old in 2005

Raelyn Balfour (Earlsville, VA), mother of Bryce who died in a hot car at 9 months old in 2007

Conni Lowe (Lexington, KY), grandmother of Holly who died in a hot car

Alan Lyon (Dolgeville, NY), parents of Sophia Lea Marie who died in a hot car at 15 months old

Carla Lyon (Dolgeville, NY), parents of Sophia Lea Marie who died in a hot car at 15 months old

Miles Harrison (Purcellville, VA), parents of Chase who died in a hot car at 21-months-old

Carol Harrison (Purcellville, VA), parents of Chase who died in a hot car at 21-months-old

Doug and Diana Grote (Moore, SC), parents of Kristen who died in a hot car at 3 years old

Henrique Aveiro and Karen Osorio (Mason, OH), parents of Sofia Victoria who died in a hot car at 15 months old in 2017

Richie Gray (Hartsville, SC), parent of Sophia Jane Goyeneche-Gray who died in a hot car at 13 months old in 2014

Samantha Cooper, friend of Miles Harrison whose sweet boy Chase died in a hot car

Bejan Rufeh, friend of Miles Harrison whose sweet boy Chase died in a hot car

Deannie Jacobsen (Sugarland, TX), parents of Luke who died in a hot car at 7-months-old

Leland Jacobsen (Sugarland, TX), parents of Luke who died in a hot car at 7-months-old

Amber Rollins (Olathe, KS), mother who had a near miss with her 3-month-old

Carol MacDonald (Staunton VA), grandmother of Robbie MacDonald who died at 3 years old in a hot car

Yan Du and Sheng Li (San Antonio), parents of Claire who died in a hot care at 11 months old in 2017