

Marissa Rodriguez
Mother of Luna and Phoenix

Good afternoon. My name is Marissa Rodriguez, and I am the mother of Luna and Phoenix. On July 26, 2019, my entire world came crashing down. The day began like any other. It was a hopeful, happy day—especially being a Friday because we were planning to take our 1-year-old twins Luna and Phoenix to the beach for the first time that weekend. That morning, I strapped them in their car seats, sang to them and kissed them, not knowing it was the last time I would be able to do so. My husband, Juan, set out to take them to daycare on his way to work at the VA hospital, where he spent the day counseling disabled veterans.

At around 4pm that day, while I was at work, I got a call from Juan asking me to pick up the kids from daycare, as he had to leave his primary job to head to a military base for another job. This was our normal exchange and confirmation of who was picking them up.

As he was driving, he put his hand on the back of the passenger seat ...he realized he was touching the top of Luna's car seat. He pulled over and, without looking, slowly reached down touching the top of her head ...and felt her hair. It wasn't until that moment that he realized he never dropped off the twins.

The next call I received was a call of horror. My husband was screaming while trying to come to terms with what he had done. I could not believe it was true.

Gone was my beautiful Luna, my sweet little girl with dark hair and captivating blue eyes, who loved music and dancing. Gone was my handsome Phoenix, my big boy, who loved climbing and going down the slides in our backyard.

Our hopeful day turned into the worst day of our lives. Everything shattered—my family, our carefree happiness, and our hopes and dreams for their beautiful, bright futures. Juan will never truly forgive himself, and we both struggled with our desire to stay here on earth. The details and images in our heads of that day and the following days will never leave our minds. Having to confirm it was our babies in the morgue, having to see their little bodies in their tiny coffins, having to go back home to their empty bedroom and high chairs... I don't wish that on anyone, ever. Today, everything in our lives is divided into "before and after the twinkies passed away." I never knew something like this could happen to loving, cautious parents. I love them and I miss them so much, and I feel I have to do something to stop this from happening over and over to other families. When I learned technology existed that could have alerted us that our babies were left in the car, my heart broke further. Our hearts shatter every time we learn that another child has died in this same manner, and AGAIN, EVERY time that this VITAL safety rule gets delayed. You see, families have been coming here to DC for more than a decade and pleading for action. There are no excuses for these delays.

Today, I am calling on the NHTSA to move this final rule forward for Luna, for Phoenix, for all the children who have lost their lives, and for all of the beautiful, healthy, happy children alive today. I beg you to pass this final rule ... so that more babies do not have to die this way.