July 1, 2020

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation (Auto Innovators) appreciates the United States Department of Transportation’s dedication to child safety and your ongoing efforts to increase public awareness concerning the heatstroke risks that children face when left unattended in motor vehicles. Our members share your continued commitment to expanding public awareness of these risks.

Auto Innovators is the singular, unified voice of the automotive industry and represents automakers that manufacture 99 percent of all light-duty automobiles sold in the United States. Our underlying mission is to develop safer, cleaner, and smarter mobility options for the American public. In September 2019, our current automaker members announced a voluntary commitment to install rear seat reminder systems in all passenger vehicles and light trucks by model year 2025 to help address the dangers related to vehicle heatstroke. Auto Innovators and our members remain fully committed to fulfilling the pledge to provide new car buyers access to these safety features faster than would have been possible under a statutory-mandated rulemaking process. As you know, such rulemaking efforts traditionally take four to eight years to finalize. The approach that automakers are committed to will not only speed the adoption of such features but also allow for a wide range of technological solutions.

Through our proactive, collective efforts, automakers will continue to introduce a wide range of approaches to help parents and caregivers remember to check the back seat as they leave a vehicle. These prompts include a combination of auditory and visual alerts that will activate after a driver turns off the vehicle. To be clear, this voluntary commitment represents a floor and not a ceiling for automotive innovation.

Although automakers continue to provide an increased number of new light-duty vehicles with such systems, we cannot overlook the need for on-going consumer education and public awareness to help prevent heatstroke fatalities. Parents and caregivers must recognize that it is never okay to leave a child alone in a vehicle - not for any length of time or in any weather conditions. Children are particularly susceptible to heatstroke because their bodies cannot regulate temperature as efficiently as an adult. The speed at which the temperature inside a vehicle rises, even with seemingly mild temperatures outside warrants continued public education.
As rear seat reminders become more common in new vehicles, and customers purchase those vehicles, other resources are available to bridge the gap. Mobile applications and child seats equipped with alarm features, are available right now that can help prompt drivers to check the back seat before exiting a vehicle.

The voluntary commitment by automakers for rear seat reminders demonstrates how our members seek opportunities to innovate and accelerate the safe deployment of advances in personal transportation. This commitment is an illustration of proactive auto industry initiatives, which, when combined with public efforts to promote greater consumer understanding and awareness, will significantly improve safety. Auto Innovators and our members look forward to continuing to work with the United States Department of Transportation to improve child safety and to help combat the dangers of vehicle heatstroke.

Sincerely,

John Bozzella
President and CEO