



Statement of Donald L. Mays
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Consumers Union / *Consumer Reports*
Support of the Cameron-Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act of 2005

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It is a pleasure for me to be here in support of this bill written to protect the most innocent segment of our society.

For the past 70 years, Consumers Union has been testing products, reporting our findings in *Consumer Reports* magazine, and working at many levels to protect consumers. Our independent product testing often uncovers hidden safety hazards that can result in serious injury or worse.

Last year, more than 100 children were killed by vehicles whose drivers simply could not see them in the blind zone behind the vehicle. According to the CDC, nearly 7,500 children were treated in US emergency rooms between 2001 and 2003 for backover injuries. These incidents could be prevented if drivers had a way to see or detect what is behind them while backing up. Every vehicle has blind zones. Side and rearview mirrors are insufficient to combat them. Our tests show that the longer and higher the vehicle, the bigger the blind zone is likely to be. As SUVs, minivans, and pickup trucks continue to supplant the sedan as the family vehicle, we think this deadly problem will only get worse.

For *Consumer Reports*, we measure the blind zone behind every vehicle we test – placing cones the size of an average 2-year old-behind sedans, minivans, SUVs, and pickups. We have uncovered many vehicles that have dangerously large blind zones behind them; by far the biggest blind zone we measured was for the 2002 Chevrolet Avalanche pickup truck: a whopping 51 feet behind a short driver.

We also tested vehicles that have as standard equipment rearview cameras that help the driver see what's behind them while backing up. With the Acura MDX Touring and the Honda Pilot EX-L, the blind zones behind the vehicle were completely eliminated using backup camera technology. Without the cameras, the blind zones for short drivers would be 24 feet for the Acura and 20 feet for the Honda.

There are no Federal Government requirements for backup warning sensors or rearview cameras on any vehicle sold in the US. Unfortunately, the few vehicles that now come with this technology are higher-end models, and most devices are available as an extra-cost option. We believe that sensing technology, such as rearview cameras are essential, and should be a requirement by Federal law. Their cost is small compared to the cost of a child's life. And once this technology becomes standard equipment in vehicles, systems will become more economical for manufacturers to produce.

Without these devices, parents and families will continue to suffer the terrible tragedy of accidentally backing over a child. That is why it is critical Congress pass the Cameron-Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act of 2005 – to require a rearward visibility standard that will provide drivers with a means of detecting a child behind them.