Technical Working Group on Advanced Impaired Driving Prevention Technology Outlines Pathway To Meet Deadline for Required New Car Safety Feature

WASHINGTON (April 18, 2023) – The Technical Working Group on Advanced Impaired Driving Prevention Technology (TWG) today released recommendations for the U.S. Department of Transportation as it establishes a new car safety standard that will prevent impaired driving, as required in the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The guidance, based on months of research by the TWG's auto safety experts and consumer advocates, recommends a path forward to meet the law's 2024 deadline for USDOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to complete a rulemaking for the new safety standard. Auto makers would be required to build the technology into all new vehicles beginning in 2026-2027.

The TWG guidance recommends incorporating comprehensive systems in cars that detect blood alcohol content along with driver monitoring technologies such as cameras and other sensors that will eventually detect impairment by other drugs, distracted and drowsy driving. Because such a comprehensive system will take time to develop and test, the TWG recommends first addressing the most critical issue – driver alcohol impairment – in the short term and incentivizing further development to expand the prevention systems in subsequent years. The systems should both prevent cars from operating when drivers are alcohol-impaired and would warn drivers when other risky driving is detected.

"The best driver impairment detection system will be capable of detecting a wide range of impairment types and reacting in a way that limits risk to everyone on the road, including the driver," the guidance states. "With this approach, prevention of drug-, distraction-, or fatigue-related driver impairment would not need to be required in initial years of a mandate, nor would intervening in the operation of a moving vehicle. While a comprehensive system is the target, the TWG believes that the benefits of early deployment vastly exceed the value of waiting for a perfect system."

The TWG was formed in June 2022 to review existing technologies and systems in development that have the potential to satisfy the mandate. Its guidance is the result of months of research, meetings and discussions with experts in the field.

"After a comprehensive review, we believe passive impaired driving prevention technology is an achievable requirement which will save lives from preventable deaths and injuries on the road," said TWG co-chair Jeff Michael, Distinguished Scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and former associate administrator at NHTSA. "Our goal is to offer federal regulators our findings regarding this complex but necessary and lifesaving requirement."

The impaired driving prevention technology mandate is the result of a bipartisan effort in Congress, led by Congresswoman Debbie Dingell of Michigan and Senator Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico. The provision, known as the Honoring the Abbas Family Legacy to Terminate (HALT) Drunk Driving Act, is

named for a Michigan family of five – parents Issam and Rima Abbas and their children Ali, Isabella and Giselle – who were killed by a wrong-way drunk driver on January 6, 2019. A coalition of victims, survivors and traffic safety advocates rallied around the HALT Act and celebrated its passage in November 2021.

"I thank the experts on the Technical Working Group for their diligent research and this new guidance, which brings us one step closer to implementing comprehensive impaired driving prevention systems in new vehicles," said Congresswoman Dingell. "We have the capability and technology to prevent impaired driving and save lives, and these recommendations help us move toward our goal of protecting families and communities from suffering the devastation of losing a loved one to drunk driving."

Drunk driving is the leading cause of death on America's roads, with one person killed every 39 minutes in an alcohol-related crash. In 2021, 13,384 people were killed by drunk driving and nearly 400,000 people were injured.

"Drunk and impaired driving deaths continue to take far too many lives across the nation. When I was hit head-on by a drunk driver many years ago, I was lucky to survive — but thousands of families each year are devastated by drunk and impaired driving crashes. I know how important it is to put an end to this crisis, and I know that there is more we can do right now to take steps toward achieving this goal," said Senator Luján. "The guidance announced today by the Technical Working Group represents important progress toward ending drunk and impaired driving and saving lives. The HALT Act is one of the most important initiatives to make our roads safer today, and it must be implemented thoughtfully and without delay."

TWG co-chair Stephanie Manning, chief government affairs officer for Mothers Against Drunk Driving, noted the urgent need for advanced impaired prevention technology, especially after two consecutive years of 14% increases in alcohol-related traffic deaths.

"!t's shocking that in 2021 the number of people killed in drunk driving crashes exceeded 13,000 for the first time since 2006," Manning said. "The TWG's recommendations are aimed at fulfilling the work of courageous victims and survivors who want to make sure no other family is left heartbroken by this violent crime. The timeline for implementing passive impaired driving prevention technology is well within reach, and it can eliminate this public health crisis once and for all."

Contact: Becky Iannotta, biannotta@gmail.com