

December 22, 2020

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary-designate, Department of Transportation

Dear Secretary-designate Buttigieg:

Congratulations on your selection by President-elect Biden to serve as the next U.S. Secretary of Transportation. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) looks forward to working with you to save lives and prevent injuries on our nation's roads.

Since MADD's founding 40 years ago, we have made tremendous progress, reducing drunk driving deaths by over 52 percent. But the job is not done. Each year more than 10,000 people are killed and thousands more are injured in drunk driving crashes. We want to eliminate drunk driving, and we know that cannot happen without using advanced technology. We ask for your support.

During our 40 years, we have worked with many of your U.S. Secretary of Transportation predecessors on lifesaving measures, such as the 21-year-old minimum drinking age, the national .08 BAC standard and far reaching high-visibility traffic safety law enforcement campaigns.

We commend your emphasis on highway safety in the infrastructure plan you proposed earlier this year. The latest highway fatality data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, showing more than 36,000 fatalities in 2019, are yet another indication that we are not doing enough to save lives and prevent injuries on our roads.

Twenty-eight percent of all roadway fatalities are the result of alcohol-impairment crashes. Eliminating death and injury caused by drunk driving is the principal focus of MADD's ongoing public policy activities.

MADD's current Federal priority is enactment of legislation that will require all new vehicles to be equipped with advanced passive technology that will control or prevent an impaired driver from operating a vehicle. This lifesaving technology must be made standard equipment in all vehicles through adoption of a motor vehicle safety standard.

A recent study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimates that more than 9,400 lives - about one-fourth of the current highway death total - will be saved each year when all vehicles have advanced drunk driving prevention systems.

Fortunately, there have been positive developments regarding the future deployment of this technology.

- In July the U.S. House included the Honoring Abbas Family Legacy to Terminate Drunk Driving (HALT) Act as part of a major surface transportation measure. This bill called for a process that will lead to drunk driving prevention technology as standard equipment in new vehicles in a few years. The HALT Act was led through the House by Energy and

Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone (New Jersey) and Consumer Protection Subcommittee Chairwoman Jan Schakowsky (Illinois). Representative Debbie Dingell (Michigan) led the way by proposing the groundbreaking legislation right after a devastating wrong-way drunk driving crash that killed a family of five from her community - Issam and Rima Abbas and their young children Ali, Isabelle and Giselle.

- A similar measure in the Senate, the RIDE (Reduce Impaired Driving for Everyone) Act had bipartisan sponsorship from Senators Rick Scott (Florida) and Tom Udall (New Mexico). No action was taken this year but bipartisan legislation is expected in the Senate in the new Congress.

The auto industry is in the midst of a technological revolution, making enormous investments in self-driving vehicles, electrification and other advancements.

We have learned a great deal about advanced drunk driving technology progress over the past two years - since the Abbas family tragedy - and we know that the industry has the resources and the expertise to make drunk driving prevention technology a reality. We also know that Europe is pushing industry to install this technology in the near term.

This is very personal for me. I have dedicated my two-year term as MADD National President to protect other families from receiving the heart-breaking news my husband and I did on June 1, 2000. On that day, we learned that our 16-year-old daughter, Helen Marie, had become one of the more than 13,324 people killed by drunk driving in 2000. But Helen Marie was not a statistic, and neither were the other drunk driving victims that year and every other year before or since. My daughter was a real person who was rollerblading on a designated bike path on a sunny afternoon when she was run down in a crash that was preventable - and would not have happened if technology was in the impaired driver's vehicle.

On behalf of hundreds of thousands of drunk driving victims, MADD wishes you success in the Senate confirmation process, and we look forward to partnering with you to accelerate progress toward a technology solution to eliminate drunk driving. Many, many lives can and must be saved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Witty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Witty  
MADD National President