

Supporting Organizations: Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, National Safety Council, Truck Safety Coalition, League of American Bicyclists, Institute for Safer Trucking, Families for Safe Streets, StopDistractions.org, The Kiefer Foundation, Safe Kids Worldwide, AnnaLeah & Mary For Truck Safety, Stop Underrides – In Loving Memory of Roya

New Mexico Supporters: Eric Hein, IST Board Member; Barbara Toth, Vulnerable Road Users NM; Linda Unruh, Bobby's Law, NM

Quotes

“After the devastating loss of my New Mexico-raised teenager in a side underride crash with a semitrailer, I know the critical need for a dedicated point of contact within the Department of Transportation,” said Eric Hein, a bereaved parent and advocate. “It has been extremely frustrating not having a single point of contact for vehicle safety advocates.”

This newly created position will serve as a vital link between advocacy groups and the Department of Transportation, ensuring, for example, timely responses to administrative petitions, accurate information exchange, and a proactive voice for families affected by preventable vehicle crashes.

“The passage of this Bill will provide much-needed support to families like mine after my 16-year old son Riley’s death from a side underride crash.”

Eric Hein, a Board Member for the Institute for Safer Trucking

“Eleven years ago this month, my life changed forever when I survived a truck crash but learned that my daughters, AnnaLeah (17) and Mary (13), were killed due to truck underride on May 4, 2013. I became a mom on a mission to make truck crashes more survivable. I rolled up my sleeves and became a passionate advocate. But I soon realized how difficult it was to make headway at the federal level. I also became aware of many other roadway safety problems needing attention on the Road to Zero.

Eight years ago this month, I woke up with the thought in my head that a missing piece of the puzzle was a National Roadway Safety Advocate -- someone to be a vigilant voice for vulnerable victims of vehicle violence. Someone who would enable citizens to harness their grief and more effectively bring about change.

I am so thankful that I was able to share my vision with Senator Luján, and that he enthusiastically responded, ‘This could work!’ Indeed, may it become a reality and a blessing both to those families whose lives will never be the same and to others whose lives will be spared as a result.”

Marianne Karth, AnnaLeah & Mary For Truck Safety

“Our nation’s roadways have turned into killing grounds with nearly 43,000 people dying in motor vehicle crashes in 2022 and 2.3 million more being injured. The impact of this pain and suffering should be leading policy decisions within the U.S. Department of Transportation

(DOT). The DOT Victim and Survivor Advocate Act, introduced today by Sen. Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) and Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN), would create a designated seat at the table for a stakeholder representing victims and survivors. As a crash survivor, Sen. Luján knows the importance of personalizing these life-or-death issues and advancing proven solutions. We thank him and all the victim advocates for their commitment to improving roadway safety.”

Cathy Chase, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

“In my personal experience, as well as that of families I have become acquainted with in my advocacy efforts, one can feel very isolated in the aftermath of a serious roadway collision. It takes time to process losses of this magnitude, and the grieving process differs greatly for each family. While those of us most closely impacted by the event are still figuring out how to survive, our friends and acquaintances (along with the professionals and agencies with whom we have interacted) have moved on to other priorities. That is certainly understandable, but it leaves individuals whose lives have been shattered by traffic violence feeling lonely and forgotten. As time passes, resources and support become increasingly absent. In addition to much-needed infrastructure and other improvements, communities must learn to do a better job at serving this population. The establishment of a Victim's Advocate within the DOT would create a profoundly helpful liaison! Having the ‘ear’ of governmental decision-makers would provide an invaluable connection and resource for victims/families! Additionally, support from the person in that position could become instrumental in helping to equip communities to serve these persons better. All who use our roadways are vulnerable at one time or another!; creating safer road use by reversing the trend of fatalities and serious injuries is an enormous, multi-faceted job... I applaud agencies who are working toward viable solutions. I would ask legislators to take this opportunity to put a staff person in place with DOT who will serve persons like myself, and represent our uniquely important perspective in these discussions and decisions!”

Barbara Toth, Founder and Executive Director, Vulnerable Road Users NM

"Mothers Against Drunk Driving thanks Senator Luján and Representative Cohen for their legislation creating a position for a victim voice to contribute to solving the public health crisis on U.S. roads. The National Roadway Safety Advocate will bring a valuable perspective at a time when alcohol-related crashes kill or injure someone every 78 seconds - a tragic reality that underscores the urgent need for USDOT to deploy proven solutions like finalizing a rule for anti-drunk driving technology to be built into all new cars.”

Stacey D. Stewart, CEO of MADD

“It has always been true that those closest to a problem are best positioned to help solve it. No one else is closer to the carnage caused by truck crashes than crash victims and survivors. This Bill helps ensure the voices of those most impacted by deadly crashes can inform policy to reduce truck crash deaths and injuries”

Tami Friedrich, Truck Safety Coalition President & Truck Crash Victim

Tami's sister, Kris, brother-in-law, Alan, and two of their children, Brandie and Anthony, were killed in 1989 when a tanker truck overturned in front of them and exploded.

“My daughter, Roya was killed in a side underride tractor-trailer crash in 2004. The trailer her car collided with was not equipped with side underride protection. The DOT Victim and

Survivor Advocate Act will function as an intermediary between the Secretary of Transportation and families who have experienced the heartbreak of crash victims. Given the ever-increasing roadway deaths in the United States it is time to make comprehensive, lasting changes that will make a difference -- so that the federal safety agency will more effectively protect the motoring public.”

Lois Durso-Hawkins, Stop Underrides - In Loving Memory of Roya

"The loss of a loved one to traffic violence is a tragedy borne by too many Americans. So many families and victims of traffic violence find strength in offering solutions to prevent similar tragedies, and this bill would ensure they do not have to navigate the often opaque workings of the Department of Transportation alone. By creating a victim and survivor advocate, this bill would enable the voices of victims and survivors to be heard, hopefully helping the U.S. DOT take action to meet its goals to reduce roadway fatalities to zero."

Bill Nesper, Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists

“No one should die or suffer injuries on our nation's roads. The DOT Victim and Survivor Advocate position is necessary to ensure those impacted by traffic violence have a voice in making our roads safer. As America’s leading nonprofit safety advocate, NSC fully supports its establishment and believes it will ultimately help save lives.”

Mark Chung, Executive Vice President, Safety Leadership and Advocacy at the National Safety Council

“My mother, Linda, was killed by a distracted driver in 2008. Since that time, I’ve dedicated my efforts to building a grassroots organization to support victims of distracted driving. Next week over a hundred victim from all types of traffic crashes will join me on Capitol Hill to make sure Congress hears from victims. Thank you Sen. Luján and Rep. Cohen for introducing this critical legislation to help ensure victims of traffic crashes will always have a seat at the table.”

Jennifer Smith, CEO, StopDistractions.org

“The Kiefer Foundation was founded in honor of my son, Mitchel, who was killed by a distracted driver in 2016 - and our mission is to bring an end to distracted driving. On behalf of The Kiefer foundation, and the thousands of victim families, I commend Sen. Luján and Rep. Cohen for their efforts in introducing this important, life-saving legislation.”

Steve Kiefer, Chairman, The Kiefer Foundation.

“Safe Kids Worldwide is proud to support this legislation which highlights the important role of victim advocates in traffic safety.”

Torine Creppy, Safe Kids Worldwide President