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SCHAKOWSKY renews call for passage of kids and cars safety act

WASHINGTON, DC--U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined Senators Clinton and Sununu, Congressman Peter King, parents of children killed in preventable auto accidents, and consumer leaders to renew the call for passage of the Cameron Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act (HR 2230 and S. 1948).

Schakowsky's statement, as prepared for delivery, is below:

"I want to begin by thanking Kids and Cars and Consumers Union for tirelessly fighting to make cars safer for children.

"I also want to thank Senators Clinton and Sununu, and Congressman King. I am proud to be working with you in the fight for simple safety measures that will protect the lives of children. The bill we introduced, the Cameron Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act, would mandate those improved standards.

"At least 30,000 other Americans, 984 Illinoisans, who signed the petition in support of the Kids and Cars Safety Act agree that the time to pass this bill is now.

"The families who have joined us here today know all too well the urgency of passing this bill. And, I want to thank for your courage to stand with us to help protect other families from the tragedy you have experienced. You set an example for us all by turning your heartbreak into action.

"Unfortunately, your experiences are not unique. Four families each and every week last year lost a child to non-traffic, non-crash related accidents. In the first 6 months of 2006, 117 children lost their lives in accidents that could have been prevented if the cars involved had been designed better.

"Many of these children were killed without ever leaving their driveways - suffocated by unsafe power windows, backed over by cars with major blind spots, or because a car was accidentally put into motion by a child who could not control it.

"In 2005, we lost more than 100 children to back-over accidents alone. The same was true in 2004. At least two children in Illinois - a 16-month old little boy named Malcolm and a 20-month old little girl, Ewelina- were lost this year when their parents backed-over them in front of their homes.

"This should come as no surprise. As Sally Greenberg from Consumers Union will report (or has reported), the average blind spots for all makes and models of cars fall between 10 feet for wagons and hatchbacks and 23 feet for pickups (with 5'8" drivers). The worst blind spot - in the 2006 Jeep Commander Ltd - is 44 feet for a 5'8" driver; 69 feet for a 5'1" driver.

"The greatest tragedy is that these deaths are preventable - if car manufacturers do the right thing. Passing our bill, the Kids and Cars Safety Act, would make them do just that: no excuses. As Cate Winnicki, a signer of the petition from Illinois, says, "If using this technology will save just one child's life than it is worth it, but to be able to save hundreds and even thousands over the course of a few years makes it mandatory."

"Fortunately, with the passage of last year's highway bill, H.R. 3, we got the ball rolling on a number of safety provisions in our bill.

"The National Highway Safety and Transportation Administration is now responsible for collecting statistics on non-traffic, non-crash auto accidents. They will no longer be turning a blind eye and Kids and Cars won't be forced to gather the numbers on its own to ensure that the public knows about this problem.

"No longer will manufacturers be able to put power window switches in cars that make it easy for a child to be strangled by kneeling on an armrest.

"We need to build on that momentum and to go further. We need to make sure that power window switches are safe, but we also need windows to auto-reverse if there is an obstruction.

"It's important to study back-over prevention, as NHTSA is doing, but we must also require rearward visibility standards.

"And, we need a warning system to remind drivers if there is still someone in the backseat, so no child is accidentally left alone. Our bill would require these extra steps to protect our children from needless harm.

"I want to put the cost of these technologies into perspective. Adding brakeshift interlocks to prevent unintentional rolling would cost \$5. Power window sensors run between \$8-\$12. Back-over Warning Systems are currently \$300, but the price will go down as they become standard. Many car companies offer these added safety features on their higher-end vehicles. Protecting our children is not a luxury to be priced out of reach for most Americans, it is a commonsense option that should be the law of the land.

"As Illinoisan Julie Walther added when she signed the petition, "There is no cost too great for the safety of a child. Make the investment, the buyers will come."

"Ami Diekemper, also of Illinois, captures how so many feel about the tragedy of these preventable injuries and deaths: "As the mother of 3 children, it breaks my heart that anything like this can still go on. It is up to us to protect these little ones."

□ "As a grandmother of four, it breaks my heart that we have to come back month after month, year after year, and tragic story after tragic story, only to meet roadblocks to passing this commonsense legislation.□ I urge everyone to get involved and help us pass the Kids and Cars Safety Act.□ Thank you."□