

September 29, 2017

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary Peters
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson and Senator Peters:

We write to express our strong support for your leadership in advancing legislation on automated vehicles in the Senate. As you well know, automated vehicle innovation stands to revolutionize our transportation system, increasing fuel efficiency and diversity, enhancing mobility and independence, saving tens of thousands of lives each year, and changing the lives of millions more— including Americans with disabilities and our nation’s senior citizens. We commend your efforts to respond rapidly to these emerging technologies with thoughtful, well-constructed legislation.

Advocacy for continued development of automated vehicles (AVs) has drawn support from a wide coalition of disparate groups. Legacy automakers, major technology companies, State government officials, mayors of major American cities, safety advocates, Americans with disabilities, disabled veterans, energy security advocates, and America’s senior citizens have come together to support the life-changing innovation automated vehicles portend. In recognition of this diverse support, the House unanimously passed the SELF DRIVE Act to facilitate continued testing, development, and eventual deployment.

Because of automated vehicles’ extraordinary potential and the broad-based enthusiasm they generate, we find efforts to hold promising AV legislation hostage to other issues highly disconcerting. The challenge is most acute in the area of federal preemption and related liability.

Through the development of the AV START Act you have worked to maintain the existing balance between federal safety regulations and the rights of individuals to bring product liability lawsuits against vehicle manufacturers. Today certain interests seek to go beyond this balance. Existing statute and case law deal with the current boundaries of state liability claims when they conflict with federal safety regulations. We strongly believe that those who advocate rearranging those boundaries should debate that issue separately and not shift the focus or intent of the current legislation, which is to foster the early deployment of advanced vehicle safety technologies.

If the proposals of narrower interests are adopted, it could blunt the force of federal preemption and create additional regulatory uncertainty for automated vehicle manufacturers—increasing the costs of technological innovation and jeopardizing advances in AV technology development altogether.

Ceding to these onerous demands threatens to erode the diverse support that has been a hallmark of this legislative process. It will delay the revolution in mobility and accessibility that is well underway. We hope that the interest in preserving human lives and in expanding mobility for all Americans will carry the day.

Sincerely,

SECURING AMERICA'S FUTURE ENERGY
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF
NATIONAL CUED SPEECH ASSOCIATION
SEGS4VETS
60 PLUS ASSOCIATION