

March 18th, 2025
The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

We want to congratulate you on your appointment as United States Secretary of Transportation. We appreciate your commitment to making all forms of transportation in America, especially our roadways, as safe as possible and ensuring that transportation technology serves the public good.

We write to you today as families who have lost loved ones or suffered life-altering injuries in crashes involving Tesla's driver assistance technology. Given your personal experience—your wife, Rachel, narrowly survived a head-on by a driver asleep at the wheel—we trust you understand the devastation that dangerous technology on our roadways can inflict.

We are deeply concerned that NHTSA's oversight of autonomous vehicle (AV) systems may be weakened, particularly through the repeal of the Standing General Order rule. We fear this important measure is under threat given recent media reports and the influence of Tesla CEO Elon Musk, whose company operates the most widely used Level 2 ADAS systems in America.

According to NHTSA data, there have been over 1,800 crashes involving Tesla's Full Self-Driving (FSD) and Autopilot reported since 2019, including dozens of fatalities and many more serious injuries. Just as your family has experienced the life-shattering consequences of a preventable motor vehicle collision, we've had our own devastating experiences, all of which were caused by Tesla's autonomous driving technology being released onto the roadways without the necessary safeguards.

- Neima Benavides lost her sister, Naibel, because of a failure in Tesla's Autopilot. On April 25th, 2019, Naibel and her boyfriend Dillon Angulo were parked off a roadway in Key Largo, Florida stargazing when a Tesla Model S with Autopilot engaged barreled through a cautionary light and stop sign, striking them at highway speed. The collision killed Naibel and left Dillon catastrophically injured.
- Rebecca Taylor lost her husband, Mark, and the father of their three children on June 19th, 2020. Mark was taking out his trash in front of the family's home in Dallas, TX when a Tesla Model S with autopilot engaged struck him. He was left with a catastrophic brain trauma that he succumbed to 18 hours later.

- Lloyd and Sandy Embry lost their son, 34-year-old Landon, who was killed while riding his motorcycle on I-15 in Draper, Utah, the night of July 24th, 2022. Although Mr. Embry signaled a left lane change for at least 13 seconds before the deadly impact, a Tesla Model 3 on Autopilot failed to respond to the flashing taillight or recognize the motorcycle, slamming into him from behind. Landon Embry was pronounced dead at the scene.
- Lorena Ochoa lost her husband, Gilberto Alcazar-Lopez, and Maria Luz Nieves lost her daughter, Maria Guadalupe Nieves, on December 29th, 2019, in Gardena, CA. Gilberto and Maria were making a protected left turn when a Tesla Model S in Autopilot mode ran a red light and struck their vehicle at high speed. Gilberto and Maria were pronounced dead at the scene. Mr. Lopez also leaves behind three children, Ulises, Hector Rafael, and Marilee Cristina.
- James Silver lost his wife, Lisa Grill, on January 10th, 2022, in Pinole, CA. The couple were traveling home in their Tesla Model 3, with autopilot engaged, when it failed to engage its automatic emergency braking or take any evasive action to avoid a stationary vehicle ahead of them in the roadway. The collision took Lisa's life and severely injured James. Lisa leaves behind two children.
- Louise Pelletier's son, 23-year-old Sasha, was catastrophically injured after being struck by a Tesla on June 16th, 2023, in San Diego County, CA. Sasha was on his way to meet his family for his college graduation celebration when a Tesla with Autopilot engaged failed to appreciate Sasha's motorcycle or the traffic which had slowed to a stop, striking Sasha at freeway speed. Sasha was thrown off his motorcycle and suffered severe, life-altering brain trauma and internal organ damage that he may never recover from.

NHTSA's oversight has proven vital in uncovering safety defects in autonomous vehicle systems, leading to safety improvements like the 2023 recall of Tesla's driver monitoring system—spurred by data from Naibel's crash. This demonstrates why ongoing data collection is essential to balancing innovation with public safety.

Given NHTSA's vital role in preventing further tragedies and the current threats to its oversight authority, we respectfully urge you to take the following actions:

1. Maintain robust federal oversight of autonomous vehicles and driver assistance software
2. Preserve NHTSA's vital standing general order on autonomous vehicle crash reporting
3. Ensure active investigations into Tesla Autopilot and Full Self-Driving continue free from improper influence.

The Department of Transportation's fundamental mission is to ensure the safety of our transportation systems. This mission has never been more critical than now, as autonomous vehicle technology reshapes our roadways. We request a meeting to share our firsthand

experiences of how inadequate oversight of this technology has devastated families across America.

The deaths of our loved ones were preventable. As Secretary, you have the power to ensure these tragedies are not repeated. By maintaining strong federal safeguards, you can prevent more families from having to face the same heartbreak we have endured.

Sincerely,

Neima Benavides, sister of Naibel Benavides

Rebecca Taylor, wife of Mark Taylor

Lloyd and Sandy Embry, parents of Landon Embry

Lorena Ochoa, wife of Gilberto Alcazar-Lopez

Maria Luz Nieves, mother of Maria Guadalupe Nieves

James Silver, husband of Lisa Grill

Louise Pelletier. Mother of Sasha Pelletier