

July 22, 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton  
Chairman, The Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-6115

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are writing you to ask that you support the provisions for SUV rollover performance pertaining to rollover prevention, occupant ejection protection and roof strength contained in the **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA)** of 2005.

As the principal investigators of the world's largest study of children in crashes, Partners for Child Passenger Safety, we feel these standards and criteria would improve outcomes for child occupants in SUV-involved crashes. SAFETEA may even make SUVs among the safest vehicles for families rather than among the least safe.

SUVs are increasingly being used as family cars due to their ability to accommodate multiple child restraint systems and due to a perception that SUVs, which have a larger average size, are safer than other passenger cars. Between 1999 and 2004, the percentage of SUVs in our study increased from 15 percent to 26 percent. We are concerned that families may be traveling with a false sense of protection.

We would like to share with you preliminary findings from our study, pending publication in the journal *Pediatrics*, regarding the risk of injury to child passengers in sport utility vehicles. We looked at data representing 72,000 children ages 0-15 years, in model year 1998 or newer SUVs and passenger cars that crashed between 3/1/2000 and 12/31/2003. To our surprise, SUVs did not provide superior protection to child occupants when compared to passenger cars:

- The potential safety advantage of the heavier SUVs, was offset by other factors including the greater tendency of SUVs to rollover in a crash.
- SUVs were more than twice as likely to rollover than passenger cars.
- Rollovers contribute significantly to a child's risk of serious injury in both passenger cars and SUVs. Children in rollover crashes were three to four times as likely to be injured as those children in non-rollover crashes.
- Injury risk to unrestrained children in SUV rollover crashes increased 25-fold compared to appropriately restrained children. Nearly half of the unrestrained children in these crashes (41%) suffered a serious injury, much higher than the risk to unrestrained adults.

**We now know rollovers are a serious issue for children driven by careful well-meaning parents. Children are extra vulnerable. Rollovers are not just a life and death issue for young unrestrained male drivers, as noted in other research.**

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The safety provisions of the SAFETEA Bill 2005 would provide more families with lifesaving technologies such as electronic stability control, side impact airbags, retained safety glass in side windows, and stronger roofs. With these technologies in place, SUVs may finally live up to their potential as a safe family vehicle.

We are happy to discuss these findings with you in more detail and answer any questions you have about our research and child occupant protection. We can be reached at 215-590-3118.

Sincerely,

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Scientific Director, TraumaLink

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**About Partners for Child Passenger Safety**

Partners for Child Passenger Safety (PCPS) was formed in 1997 to address the lack of a child-focused crash surveillance system in the United States as well as the epidemic of motor vehicle crash injury, the leading cause of death for children over age one. As of February 2005, the PCPS database had information from 377,000 car crashes reported to State Farm involving more than 557,000 children. PCPS, which is based at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, is the single largest source of data on children in motor vehicle crashes from birth through age 15. PCPS is funded by State Farm Mutual Insurance Companies.

PCPS is a multidisciplinary team of internationally recognized experts in medicine, biomechanics, engineering, biostatistics/epidemiology, health education, advocacy and behavioral science.

In addition to analyzing crash data, the researchers conduct in-depth telephone interviews with families to fully assess the range of crash and injury severity; on-site crash investigations are conducted to provide information on injury mechanisms. To date, researchers have conducted more than 25,000 interviews and 800 on-site crash investigations.