

Statement of Laurie Higginbotham

Hello, my name is Laurie Higginbotham. I am from Memphis, Tennessee. I am joined by my husband, Randy, and my son's girlfriend, Ashley McMillan.

My son, Michael, was killed in a truck side underride crash on November 18, 2014. As he was driving home that night, a truck driver was making an illegal U-turn across four lanes. Michael, unable to see the truck's trailer, did not slow down in time. His car lodged under the trailer, the airbags did not deploy, and police pronounced him dead at the scene.

My son's death was preventable as are hundreds of deaths and many injuries every year caused by truck underride crashes. In the U.S., while most trailers are required to have a rear underride guard, there are no requirements for side underride or front override guards.

Unfortunately though, the standard for the rear guard is more than 20 years old. Even worse, the government's proposed update is to replace it with a weak ten-year-old Canadian standard, which 93 percent of trailers in use today meet and many even exceed.

But the good news is that there are safer guards available. Last year, Randy, Ashley, and I attended the first ever truck underride roundtable. It was co-hosted by the Truck Safety Coalition, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, and the Karth Family. The event brought together families like mine, safety advocates, industry representatives, researchers, and government regulators to discuss truck underride crashes and solutions to prevent them.

There, we saw a crash test in which a car crashed into the rear of a trailer where 30 percent of the car overlapped with the trailer at 35 miles per hour. The guard was successful and prevented an underride crash, even though this is the most difficult type of underride crash to prevent. Considering that large truck rear impacts made up 22 percent of fatal two vehicles collisions between large trucks and passenger vehicles, it critical that the United States improve the standard for rear guards in a meaningful way.

Side underride crashes also pose preventable risks, but there is promising technology. Often in a side underride, the crumple zone in the hood is bypassed as it rides underneath the trailer, leaving the front seat occupants exposed to the force of the impact without the airbags deploying. There have been encouraging developments in side guards that government regulators should be considering. Earlier this year, there was a side guard that was tested and it successfully prevented a 90-degree crash at 35 mph, the most difficult side underride crash to prevent.

Strengthening the rear underride guard standard and requiring side underride guards on trucks will save lives. Additionally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration should

immediately begin research on the benefits of requiring U.S. trucks to have front override guards, and, require them thereafter. Front override guards are in use in Europe and the United States should not be falling behind on yet another critical truck safety issue. It is time to make truck rear and side underride and front override crashes a problem of the past. Thank you.