

Statement of Natalie Sanders

Hello, my name is Natalie Sanders and I am from Lexington, South Carolina.

On September 24, 2015, my husband and soulmate was killed in a large truck crash on his way to work. As he drove northbound that day on I-77, a truck driver lost control of his big rig, crossed the interstate median, and collided into Brian's pick-up truck. I did not find out until I got home from work that my husband had been killed. Since the crash, it has been extremely difficult for me to accept that this is my new reality: coming home and Brian not being there.

In my short time volunteering with the Truck Safety Coalition, I have learned that so many people from all over the country have had their lives forever changed because of a truck crash. In fact my home state of South Carolina has the sixth highest truck crash fatality rate in the country. I bet many of these survivors are plagued with questions. I am particularly stuck on one question -- what if the truck that lost control and collided with my husband's pick-up had been equipped with automatic emergency braking?

After hearing that this life-saving technology has been required on trucks in the European Union since 2012, I cannot get this question out of my mind.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that requiring automatic emergency braking on commercial motor vehicles will save 70 lives and prevent nearly 3,500 serious injuries annually. For every year that this rule is delayed, people are dying and injuries are being incurred needlessly. Some of those killed and injured will be folks just going on with their days like Brian. Others will be construction workers whose lives are imperiled every day as 27 percent of fatal work zone crashes involve a truck. Some are law enforcement officers like Lee, who was struck while in his police cruiser. And, some will be the truck drivers, whose job is one of the deadliest in our country.

Many of the leading U.S. companies equip their fleets with automatic emergency braking, and we applaud them for doing so. They have experienced incredible results. For instance, one major company saw a 71 percent reduction in rear-end collisions. That statistic should make any motor carrier who is opposed to mandating automatic emergency braking reconsider. Not only will their trucks be involved in fewer crashes, but their drivers will also be safer and ultimately, their liability will be lower. I urge the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue a minimum standard on this technology so that companies who purchase these systems know what they are buying and that there is confidence that it works as it should.

Automatic emergency braking can prevent crashes, save lives, and reduce injuries and it should be put on all large trucks. The cost of continuing to delay this lifesaving technology is too great to wait any longer.