

# ADVOCACY



**“I had to find a way to work through my father’s death**

**and try and make sense of it, and advocacy has been that avenue... It’s a never-ending battle trying to make our highways safer, but at the same time, there’s no better way to honor the memory of your loved one than to work on these issues... And if we – the families who have experienced the catastrophic tragedy of these crashes - don’t pull together and advocate for safer trucking, then who will?”**

*- Jennifer Tierney, whose father was killed in a truck crash*



## When You Are Ready

Unfortunately fatal truck crashes and crashes resulting in serious injuries happen every day in our country. Although at first it might seem like these crashes are “accidents,” there are recurring causes for them, such as overtired truck drivers, overweight trucks and poorly maintained brakes and equipment, to name just a few. The Truck Safety Coalition advocates for improvements to truck safety laws and regulations, and one of our most effective methods is working together with people like you. Throughout the years we have worked with many survivor volunteers who have decided to take action in memory of their loved ones. And, working together we have made a difference.

When you feel that you are ready, just call or email us -- it really is that simple. No matter what your background or experience is, you can help. It does not matter where you live or how much time you can give. We can find a way to match your interests and skills that will help to advance safety and promote change. For example, we need people to clip out newspaper articles about truck crashes in their areas; we need others to keep an eye on what their state agencies and legislatures are doing about truck safety laws; we need people to send emails to their elected officials; we need family members to share their stories; and, this list continues.

One of the best ways to take the first step is to attend our Sorrow to Strength conference. The conference begins on a weekend during which time you will meet other people from throughout the country who have loved ones who were killed or suffered serious injuries in truck crashes. We hold sessions on a variety of topics including grief management, using the media to get your message heard and truck safety advocacy. We arrange meetings for you to talk with your Members of Congress, together with one of our staff, on the Monday and Tuesday after the weekend sessions. People who have attended Sorrow to Strength have shared with us that the conference has helped them in their grieving process and to become empowered. Please see [www.trucksafety.org](http://www.trucksafety.org) for more information.

## Issues

We work on many truck safety issues to advance safer drivers and safer vehicles. Some of the issues we are currently pursuing are:

### **Truck Size and Weight: Opposing Increases in Current Federal Truck Size and Weight Laws**

Bigger, heavier trucks are more dangerous and destructive. Making existing trucks heavier increases crash risk due to poorer braking and more rollover crashes. Numerous federal and private sector studies have shown that longer, heavier trucks operate with lower safety margins on both Interstate and lower class roads. The Truck Safety Coalition strongly supports retaining the 1995 legislated freeze on longer combination vehicles (LCVs) and the current federal size and weight limits and opposes any special trucking interest exemptions to roll back safety.

### **Hours of Service: Advocating for a Commonsense Truck Driver Hours of Service Rule that Reduces Fatigue**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) have repeatedly cited fatigue as a major factor in truck crash causation. The current federal hours of service (HOS) regulations allow truck drivers to drive up to 11 hours after 10 consecutive hours off duty. This



rule, which was first issued in 2003, dramatically increased truck drivers' workdays by 40% more hours over 8 days and allowing them to drive 28% more hours over the same time period. Safety groups challenged the regulation twice in court and were victorious both times. The Truck Safety Coalition has been urging DOT to issue a new HOS rule that reduces daily and weekly work hours.

### **Mandating the Use of Electronic On-Board Recorders (EOBRs) for Every Truck and Bus**

EOBRs can automatically record the hours that commercial operations drive trucks and motor coaches in interstate commerce. It is a well known fact that hours of service violations are routine among big truck drivers. Currently, trucks use paper logbooks often called "comic books" because false entries are so prevalent.

### **Increasing Minimum Insurance Levels for Motor Carriers**

Minimum levels of insurance for trucks are \$750,000 and \$5 million on motor coaches. Levels have not been increased in 30 years and are woefully deficient. Consequently, a very large portion of the damages and losses caused by truck crashes is imposed upon the American motoring public and not the trucking industry. If the industry were to be required to absorb the losses it causes, there would be significant changes in the industry which would result in safer highways for all. At a minimum property-carrying motor carriers should be required to carry at least \$5 million per incident and transporters of hazardous materials and people should be required to carry at least \$15 million worth of coverage.

### **Urging DOT to Issue Overdue Safety Standards on Rear and Side Underride**

In an underride crash, a passenger vehicle goes partially or wholly under a truck or trailer, increasing the likelihood of death or serious injury to the passenger vehicle occupants. It is estimated that front, side or rear underride occurs in 50 percent of all fatal crashes. The TSC has been urging DOT to issue a rule that requires all trucks and trailers to be equipped with velocity-sensitive, energy-absorbing rear impact guards and side panels mounted lower to the ground (16 inches) to effectively protect car occupants from death and injury in rear and side impact crashes. Proven safety technology is available.

### **Reducing Speed Limits for Trucks: Set Speed Governors at 65 mph**

When tractor-trailer trucks travel at speed rates of 55 mph or higher, it significantly increases the likelihood the truck will either jackknife or rollover. Additionally, trucks traveling at 65 mph have nearly twice the force of impact in a crash than at 55 mph. Large trucks require much longer distances than cars to stop. In fatal two-vehicle crashes involving a passenger vehicle and a large truck, 97 percent of the deaths were the occupants in the passenger vehicles.

### **Getting Started**

As someone whose life has been affected by a truck crash, you have a unique perspective and critical voice in the truck safety debate. As a citizen you have the right to express your opinion to government leaders and your elected officials. Public officials work to serve the people. They cannot do their jobs effectively if they do not hear the opinions and interests of the people, especially the citizens of their states who vote them into office. The Truck Safety Coalition can work together with you so that you can communicate your views effectively and to the appropriate officials.



You have several elected officials at the federal and state levels with different decision-making authority. The United States Congress is comprised of two “Houses,” the Senate and the House of Representatives. You have one member of the House of Representatives who represents your district, and they are referred to as Congressman or Congresswoman, or Representative. You have two Senators who represent your state. To learn about the legislative process in the Houses and to find out who your Members of Congress are, you can visit [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

Each state has its own state legislature. Most are comprised of two “Houses,” the Senate and the House of Delegates or the Assembly [Note- some are House of Representatives]. Members of a House of Delegates are called Delegate, and members of an Assembly are called Assemblyman or Assemblywoman. A simple way to find the website of your state legislature is to do a “google” search, i.e., search for “Alabama state legislature.” On these websites you can learn about how your legislature works and who your state representatives are.

The two levels of government are responsible for, or have jurisdiction over, different truck safety issues. If a truck is traveling solely within one state, it must comply with State and local regulations, as well as some select federal regulations. If a truck is traveling between two or more states, it is engaged in “interstate commerce” and must comply with State and local regulations, as well as all federal regulations.

The chief functions of the Members of the U.S. Congress and the state legislatures are:

**Lawmaking:**

- Studying, debating, and voting on legislation.
- Proposing, drafting, and modifying laws and programs as necessary.
- Funding government programs.

**Representing:**

- Serving constituents living in their district.
- Assisting citizens in their dealings with government.

**Monitoring:**

- Overseeing the work of departments and agencies funded by taxpayers.
- Keeping the lawmaking process open, transparent and honest.

Building and maintaining working relationships with your elected officials and their staff is an important part of trying to create positive changes in safety. Typically, each staff member is responsible for specific issues on which they advise the elected officials. The staff has the ear of the Member of Congress on a daily basis, and it is his or her job to keep the Member informed of developments on their assigned issues. When legislation regarding that issue is being considered, the Member of Congress looks to that staff member for guidance.

Members of the House of Representatives have offices in their districts and in Washington, D.C. U.S. Senators have several offices throughout the state. You can request a meeting with your Senators and



Representative at any time in any of their offices. Every meeting that you have is important and there are some key points that will help you have a successful outcome. While each congressional office is different, there are similarities in how they are organized. Here is a list of the typical staff titles you will likely find in Congressional offices on Capitol Hill:

**Chief of Staff / Administrative Assistant:** The Chief of Staff or “AA” is usually the most senior staff position for a Member of Congress.

**Legislative Director:** The “LD” helps determine the legislative priorities for the office. This staff member is knowledgeable on most current policy and familiar with the Member of Congress’ position on those issues.

**Legislative Assistant:** Most offices have several LAs. Each LA is assigned to specific policy issues. You should be working with the LA responsible for transportation issues, also known as the “transportation LA.”

**Legislative Correspondent:** Congressional offices receive a tremendous amount of correspondence on federal issues. The “LC” helps to handle responses to constituents and works closely with LAs. At times the LC is given an issue on which to work. Usually, the information about that issue is filtered through the LA before it ever gets to the Member of Congress.

The district office(s) in the home state is/are focused on constituent relations and services and often passes issues of federal policy and legislation on to the Washington, D.C. office. However, the district office is the only point of contact most constituents have with the Member of Congress. Since this office reads the pulse of the community and helps the Washington, D.C. office determine the major local concerns, it is important that the staff in this office know that truck safety is a priority in the community. The staff in this office is critical in arranging local meetings with the Member of Congress. For these reasons, it is important to establish a relationship with the district staff. A typical district office consists of the following staff:

**District Director:** This staff person works in the local office. The District Director works with the Chief of Staff/AA in Washington to ensure the Member of Congress is knowledgeable about the local concerns.

**Field Representative:** This staff person’s job is to be a liaison in the community. Typically, the workload in the district office is divided by either geography or issue and the field reps are assigned specific sections.

**Case Worker:** Caseworkers usually work on specific constituent problems such as getting a passport or visa, solving problems with social security payments, etc. For advocacy purposes, these are usually not the staffers with whom you should be working on truck safety policy.



The three main ways to communicate with your elected officials are:

1. **Call your elected officials**
2. **Write your elected officials**
3. **Meet with your elected officials**

### Calling Elected Officials

Calling your elected officials is a good way to begin the advocacy process. It provides an initial opening of dialogue between you and your representative. The Truck Safety Coalition often distributes Action Alerts which include information to assist you in your calls. The following are some recommendations for making phone calls to your elected officials:

- **Prepare.** Have an outline or list of talking points of what you intend to discuss with the legislator. If necessary, do research so that you know the subject and its relevancy to current legislation. When we distribute Action Alerts, all the information you should need will be included.
- **Identify yourself.** Give your name, address and affiliation with the Truck Safety Coalition.
- **Relax.** If you are nervous, relax and treat the phone call like a normal, casual business conversation. Do not read verbatim from your notes, but speak clearly and slowly.
- **Be brief.** Concisely state why you are calling, your position and make your point.
- **Identify the legislation.** If you are calling about specific legislation, make sure you identify the legislation by name and number, or by its sponsors. If the legislator or staff person is not familiar with the legislation, provide him or her with a brief summary.
- **When appropriate, ask for a viewpoint and vote.** It is not always the easiest thing to accomplish, but when possible, try to find out the legislator's views on the legislation, and ask for a commitment to support your position on the bill by voting for or against the legislation.
- **Don't argue.** While you can discuss your position on an issue or bill, it is ineffective to engage in an argument with the legislator or staff person. You will be more likely to get your message across by keeping your cool, and your conversation clear and succinct. Be courteous, direct and fair.
- **Don't get discouraged.** Don't give up if you get a busy signal when you call. This simply means that others are getting through with a message as well. (You can always send a fax or email if you can't get through right away). Also, don't be discouraged if you speak with a staff person. Conduct the conversation as you would with the legislator.
- **Follow up.** Send a thank you note to the legislator or staff person. Although listening to citizens' views is part of their jobs, this is a courtesy and a great opportunity to briefly restate your position in writing while building an ongoing relationship.
- **Be positive.** Positive phone calls to your legislator can be very helpful. If your official has recently supported truck safety legislation, a thank you or commendation is always received favorably.

### Writing to Elected Officials

Writing a letter to elected officials can be a very effective way to convey your thoughts and concerns on an issue. It is an important way to document your position and it is something that the official and staff can refer back to, long after a phone call or meeting is over. Letters to your own legislators are



especially important, as you are the ones to which they are ultimately responsible for voting them into office. When an elected official receives numerous letters on a specific issue, it does influence his or her position and vote.

Here are a few tips:

- **Email or Postal Mail.** If you are writing to a Member of Congress, emails or faxes are highly preferred to postal mail because letters go through a security process and take a long time to be delivered to offices. All Members have websites and if you are a constituent, you can write your letter to them on their sites (sometimes you can if you are not a constituent as well). If you are not able to send a letter through their site, you can call their office and ask for the most efficient way to transmit your letter, i.e., email the Transportation Legislative Assistant. You might want to print out your letter in case it gets lost in cyber-space and also for documentation should you have a follow-up meeting with your representative. If you are writing to a state elected official while they are in session, mail the letter directly to their office in the state capital. If the legislature is not in session, send the letter to the legislator's district office address. Or, you can also send emails to most state officials on the state legislature websites.
- **Write your own thoughts and words.** Write about your personal experience and how the issue affects you. The combination of knowing your facts and having personal experience is very powerful. Remember to be brief and direct. Clearly state your position on the issue. Show your knowledge in a concise format. Be direct and firm, but not hostile.
- **Identify yourself.** If you have met the legislator before, personalize the letter by noting briefly when and where that occurred so he or she can place a face with your name.
- **Address elected officials properly.** On the federal level, a member of the House of Representatives is, "The Honorable Jane Doe," then "Dear Representative Doe:". A Senator is, "The Honorable John Smith," then "Dear Senator Smith:". On the state level, you will need to check for the proper titles for your state representative.
- **Be concise.** A one-page letter is more likely to be read than a longer one.
- **Mention legislation.** If appropriate, cite a specific bill number and name or its principal sponsors. If the bill is not well known, a short summary of the bill may be helpful.
- **Request a specific action.** State exactly what you want the elected officials to do. For example, ask the legislator to support or oppose a particular bill or amendment, request a hearing, or co-sponsor a bill.
- **Ask for a reply.** If you ask a question or request something, ask the legislator for a reply explaining his or her position and include your return address in the body of the letter.
- **Write a follow-up letter.** If you asked for a reply and did not receive one, write another letter asking for a response. If the legislator supports your position on an issue, send a thank you note. It will be a refreshing change to most letters they receive.

### Meeting with Your Elected Officials

Meeting with your elected official is simply a face-to-face version of writing a letter or having a telephone conversation. Most legislators want to meet with citizens from their districts to hear their concerns and recommendations. You only have to be passionate about an issue to get your message across, not an expert lobbyist.



When you are arranging a meeting with a Congressional office, don't be disappointed if you are not able to meet with the Member of Congress right away. Frequently, you may be referred to the staff member assigned to transportation issues before meeting with the elected Member of Congress. By using this approach, you may be able to gain the support of the staff who will help brief the Member of Congress on your issues. By the time you meet with the Member of Congress, he or she is fully aware of the issue and in a better position to publicly state support or opposition.

### **Scheduling a Meeting**

- Call your legislator's office and explain that you are a crash survivor and/or constituent and would like to make an appointment. On the federal level, you will probably be referred to the Member's scheduler or appointments secretary.
- Briefly explain which issue you would like to discuss with the legislator.
- If the legislator is unavailable, request a meeting with a staff person who is responsible for or knowledgeable about your issue.
- On the federal level, most congressional offices will ask that you fax or email a meeting request. If you plan to discuss a specific bill, you should mention it and provide a brief summary. If you plan to discuss general truck safety issues, it would be helpful to include what they are in the email or letter.

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

- While determining the message you wish to convey, keep in mind that you may only have a 15 minute meeting. Include brief personal experiences, which demonstrate why this issue is important to you or the group. Be sure to bring photos of your loved one. Keep your message brief and clear so that your legislator understands the issue and has time to respond.
- Answer the legislator's questions as best you can. Don't make up answers. If you can't answer a question don't worry. Make a note of the questions you could not answer and tell the legislator you will follow up and provide the answers after the meeting.
- Keep the discussion focused on the message you are there to convey. Be prepared that some people will be very compassionate, while others may be indifferent. If you meet with a Member, they may politely acknowledge your issue and then try to direct the conversation to other issues. Don't take it personally. Be confident and remember you are there for the right reasons. If the discussion gets off course, steer it back to the issue. Always be courteous. If you are not seeing eye-to-eye with the legislator and are frustrated, move on to another part of the issue or politely end the meeting. Maintaining the legislator's respect is important since you may work with him or her on another issue in the future.
- Be flexible. If Congress is busy, you might wind up having a meeting in a hallway – where you meet doesn't matter.
- Remember to leave the legislator and the staff a copy of your fact sheets, letters, and other information.
- Thank the legislator or staff member for his or her time, even if no agreement was reached on the issue.



### **After the Meeting**

- Immediately jot down some notes regarding the main points of discussion, the legislator's remarks, any unanswered questions, etc. If you did not get the aide's business card, make sure to write down his or her name.
- Complete your research to find information for unanswered questions.
- Promptly follow up with a thank you letter. Use this to restate your key points, respond to outstanding questions, and reiterate any commitments the legislator made.

As we all know the first time you do anything is usually the most difficult. If these actions seem daunting, please know that the Truck Safety Coalition is here to help you all along the way. Again, just call or email us and we will provide any assistance you need.

### **Questions?**

**Contact the Truck Safety Coalition**  
**(703) 294-6404 | [info@trucksafety.org](mailto:info@trucksafety.org)**



Robyn Lynn Jones



Christine Jones

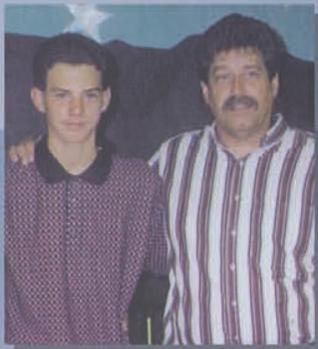


Peggy Johnson



Bob, Marie, and David Jennings

# In Memory of our Loved Ones WE HONOR THEIR LIVES



Joshua & Dwight Heslep



Dawn Marie, Stephen & Michael Michaud



Sara Dawn Engelke



Karen Jeannette Hodgerson



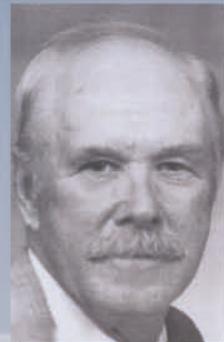
Ralph William Jones



Delaina Hodgson



Amanda D. Duvall



James E. Champ Jr.



Angela Sue Gettis

# Working Together We Can Save Lives



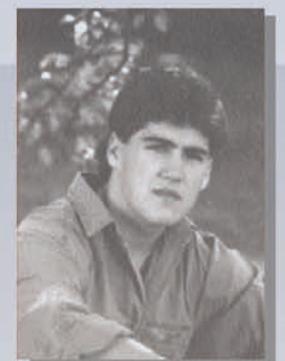
Mark E. & Anita L. Boise



David A. Phillips



Barney Hamer



Jasen Matthew Swift