

**Testimony of  
Rana Abbas Taylor, Survivor/Advocate  
Mothers Against Drunk Driving  
Before the  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Maritime, Freight and Ports  
“Driving Innovation: the Future of Automotive Mobility, Safety, and Technology”  
April 27, 2021**

Thank you Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Fischer and Members of the Committee for holding this critical hearing today. My name is Rana Abbas Taylor and I am from Northville, Michigan. I am here representing Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and hundreds of thousands of drunk driving victims and survivors throughout the country.

Every day 28 people die in drunk driving crashes in the United States – that’s one person every 52 minutes. In 2019, 10,142 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes on our nation’s roads. And approximately three hundred thousand more were seriously injured.

MADD has worked tirelessly since 1980 to prevent drunk driving crashes and to serve the victims of this 100 percent preventable crime. Thanks in part to the leadership of this Committee, we have advanced successful public policies such as the 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law, the national .08 blood alcohol concentration (BAC) standard, open container laws, repeat offender laws, high visibility enforcement campaigns and all-offender ignition interlock laws – policies which have saved countless lives. But our work is not done.

Your focus on technology and innovation today is well timed and very much needed. There is no question that technology enhancements can and must play a major role in reducing deaths and injuries on our roads.

We will hear today from industry experts who know first-hand that the auto industry is in the midst of a technological revolution. I am inspired by the knowledge and experience at this hearing. I offer a deeper perspective. I thank you, Chair Peters and Ranking Member Fischer, for recognizing that MADD’s viewpoint is critical to your deliberations. I am not here representing a business. I am here representing people in pain. People who are demanding change so that no other family has to experience what we experience every day of our lives: unbearable loss.

**The Crash: January 6, 2019**

While it is with the sincerest gratitude that I join you at this important hearing today, the truth is, I wish I did not have to be here. I should not have to be here. On Jan. 6, 2019, my world -- the only one I had ever known -- collapsed. In a split second, I lost nearly my entire family, because a drunk driver was able to get into a vehicle, take that vehicle onto the wrong side of the same freeway my family was driving on, and collide with them head-on. Killed instantly were my sister Rima, who was my only sibling and best friend; my brother-in-law, Issam; my two nieces, Isabella and Giselle; and my only nephew, Ali. They were returning home to Northville, Michigan from a family vacation in Florida.

The individual who killed my family near Lexington, Kentucky had a BAC nearly four times the legal limit -- a level so high it is lethal. Yet, he was able to operate a vehicle in this condition and senselessly wipeout the lives of five incredible people – an entire family. My family. What I didn't know then was that technologies exist that could have saved their lives and prevented any drunk driver from operating a vehicle.

I remain unable to adequately articulate the magnitude of this horrific tragedy. There are no words and, I have come to learn, no language that exists that can convey the enormity of this kind of loss. From this unimaginable pain and heartbreak was born a personal obligation that no family should ever have to suffer like ours did. Let me be clear, my family did not ask for this fight, it came crashing down on us. Sometimes, we don't choose our battles, our battles choose us.

### **My World: Rima, Issam, Ali, Isabella, Giselle**

While I remain at a loss when it comes to articulating the impact of this tragedy, there are not enough words to describe how extraordinary these five people that were ours were.

My sister, Rima, 38, was not just a physician, she was the best kind; the kind that had waiting lists of patients who would schedule appointments months in advance just to see her; the kind who really listened; the kind who sat with patients for as long as they needed and helped them navigate their fears; the kind who gave out her cell phone number to them, so that she was always within reach. Five months prior to her death, Rima had been promoted to a regional director position with Beaumont Health. Even though this new role was meant to be primarily administrative, upon her insistence and without any additional pay, she chose to continue her patient care. She had committed herself to medicine and to healing. She refused to give that up.

My brother-in-law, Issam, 42, was both a successful attorney and real estate agent, who had chosen to pursue the field of law because of his passion for justice and his conviction that it is our responsibility to use the legal mechanisms we have in place to make the world a better, safer place for all. He was a dedicated husband, father, brother, uncle and friend, who lived by example. As an expert litigator, he carried a deep commitment to fairness and equity.

Ali, or AJ as we called him, was 13. He was an old soul in a young boy's body who had inherited his parents' compassion and strong sense for a just world. His greatest desire, as evidenced by a school project, was for equity in our world. He particularly hoped for access to clean water for everyone. His ultimate concern, though, was for his family's well-being. He would worry incessantly about his parents making it home safe when they were out without him, and he would often call them, inquiring of their whereabouts.

Isabella, better known as Izzy, was 12, and was most like her mother: gentle, empathetic and soft-spoken. She was the kindest and most giving of humans and was the first to volunteer to help someone in need or make a new student feel welcome. She carried a deep love for animals, especially her two pet cats. At the time of the crash, one of her listed 'to-dos' for the New Year was to bake apology cookies for her friends at school for forgetting a Secret Santa gift exchange that final Christmas. She never got to.

Giselle, or Jazz, was only seven. Despite being the youngest -- or perhaps because of it -- she packed the biggest personality, showering every room she walked into with happiness, her magnificent smile and her special brand of goofiness. She was pure joy and sunshine. As her nickname indicated, she was the music in our lives. Her idea of fun included spending time with those she loved most. Rather than go Black Friday shopping with her mom that final November, she had insisted on being dropped off at our house so that she could eat stale Goldfish crackers and help my husband, Tom, and I trim our Christmas tree.

It is not okay that Ali, Isabella and Giselle were robbed of a future and the opportunity to realize their full potential. It is not okay that my parents had to bury their daughter, son-in-law and all of their grandchildren. It is not okay that I do not have my one and only sister by my side, or that I will never hear the words 'Auntie Rana' again. It is not okay that countless others have lost loved ones to drunk driving and suffered unspeakable trauma as a result. And it is not okay that we have the ability and know-how to prevent these tragedies from happening and save thousands of lives a year and, yet, we are still debating this matter.

### **Courageous Leadership: MADD Congressional Heroes**

Among the thousands of individuals impacted by this tragedy who attended my family's funeral was Congresswoman Debbie Dingell and Senator Gary Peters of Michigan. Senator Peters – thank you for showing up for my family during our darkest days. Your compassion means everything to us. And thank you for hearing my family, and recognizing that the auto industry can do this.

I have known and worked closely with Congresswoman Dingell for over a decade on various issues that matter mutually to us. As she later shared with me, during the services she had been approached by a classmate of my nieces and nephew who asked her how something like this could have happened. She further asked why something can't be done to prevent the loss of lives like her friends – my nieces and nephew. That conversation was the catalyst for why we are here today.

Within days of Rima, Issam, Ali, Isabella, and Giselle's preventable deaths, Congresswoman Dingell led the way by proposing groundbreaking legislation that over the past two years has been refined to reflect what is included in Honoring the Abbas Legacy to Terminate Drunk Driving Act, or HALT Act, today: a mandate for a rulemaking that would lead to a technology-neutral solution for getting drunk driving prevention technology in all passenger vehicles.

Just a few weeks ago, Congresswoman Dingell, along with Congressman David McKinley of West Virginia and Congresswoman Kathleen Rice of New York, co-sponsored the bipartisan HALT Act, which will mandate technology that will save 9,400 lives a year, according to a study released last year by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. By comparison, airbags, mandated by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 that went into effect in 1998, save about 3,000 lives a year. Seatbelts save 15,000 lives a year.

Just last week, Senator Rick Scott of Florida and Senator Ben Ray Lujan introduced a companion bill in the Senate. Both Senator Lujan and Senator Scott have shared their personal stories with MADD victims and survivors privately. Five days ago, at a press conference announcing introduction of the RIDE Act, they shared their personal stories publicly. Senator Lujan and Senator Scott – thank you.

You are one of us. You are victims and survivors yourselves, and you understand our pain. To have you lead this effort in the Senate is comforting to me and my family. We are unstoppable. Your stories - our collective stories - are our power.

Senator Scott – thank you for being with us since the beginning of the last Congress. MADD Immediate Past National President Helen Witty sends her gratitude from Florida. She greatly values your leadership, as do I. You are a fierce advocate for drunk driving victims.

Senator Lujan - thank you for effortlessly picking up the baton from long-time MADD champion Senator Tom Udall. Your vulnerability with New Mexico victims and current MADD National President Alex Otte will forever be remembered. We appreciate you and are grateful for your advocacy and leadership.

I cannot express how grateful I am for Congresswoman Dingell's courageous and swift action and leadership to create legislation in my family's honor that would end the single biggest killer on our nation's roads, and for Congressman McKinley, Congresswoman Rice and Senators Lujan and Scott's unwavering leadership on this issue. Even as the months, and now years, have gone by since that horrific day for my family, Congresswoman Dingell has remained steadfast in her commitment to seeing this legislation through and sparing thousands of families the indescribable pain and loss that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives.

I would also like to thank you, Senator Peters, for the commitment you made to my family to help us develop a regulatory framework for moving forward. You have been so wonderful to us, and we appreciate your support, insight and leadership more than you will ever know. I remember when we met in your office in October 2019 – me, my husband Tom, along with members of Issam's family. You saw our intense pain. You sat with us for an hour. And we talked about the technological revolution that was going on in the auto industry.

Senator Fischer, MADD Nebraska victims appreciate your commitment to stopping drunk driving. When victims and survivors met with you recently, you showed them so much compassion. You have shown true commitment to understanding the available technologies and what the RIDE Act will achieve. You have shown MADD that you are here to help us navigate and move forward. Thank you.

### **MADD War Room: United by Grief and Purpose**

I want to pause for a moment to say these words slowly and let them sink in: becoming a MADD victim/survivor is not a club that anyone wants to join. Absolutely no one should ever have to endure what my family has had to endure and continues to endure. And at the same time I am so honored and privileged to be a part of this movement for change, and getting to know and volunteer with some of the most incredible advocates I have ever met.

Some victims and survivors grieve in silence. Others grieve loudly. Grief affects people in very different ways. Expressions of grief are varied and that's OK. There are many of us who grieve loudly together every Thursday at 5pm ET on our MADD "War Room" calls. Our purpose is to push the RIDE Act across the finish line. We started these weekly calls many months ago as a way to stay connected, focused, and organized. We begin each call with a "Mission Moment," listening to one group member each week tell their story and share pictures of their loved ones. We then have everyone report out on what meetings they have had, and discuss next steps. We tell each other "We've got this." And our grief

has purpose. To save others from the pain we endure. Those saved by passage and implementation of the RIDE Act will never know...but we will.

### **The Auto Industry CAN End Drunk Driving NOW**

Some - not many - have questioned MADD victims and survivors as we have virtually fanned out across Capitol Hill, meeting with Members of the House and Senate. While we are not experts on vehicle technology development or selling cars, we are victims of a preventable crime who want to stop drunk drivers from being able to use their cars as weapons. We also happen to know that the auto industry can 100 percent solve this problem.

Over the past century, the auto industry has made huge strides in building cars that better protect their occupants. Speed control, lane departure warnings, automatic emergency braking, and airbags throughout the vehicle are some of the technologies that are widely deployed and even taken for granted today.

MADD has collected information from various sources inside the industry and outside the industry. More than 200 forms of technology currently exist that NHTSA can consider as part of a federal rulemaking process to set standards for drunk driving and impairment prevention technology. These innovative technologies, or a system of these technologies, will eliminate drunk driving. Many of them could be deployed today, at minimal cost. And MADD is here to say that life-saving drunk driving prevention technology must be a standard feature on all new vehicles. The auto industry tells us all today that they are leaders in innovation. I believe them. After all, I grew up with the "Big Three" in my backyard. My family is proud to hail from the Motor City. Today, on behalf of my family and the millions of victims of this devastating crime, I ask the auto industry to support the HALT Act in the House and the RIDE Act in the Senate. Let's move forward with a technology-neutral rulemaking and reach a goal of No More Victims together.

### **Drunk Driving Prevention Technology: Three Categories**

Drunk driving accounts for nearly one-third of all highway traffic deaths and represents the single biggest cause of carnage on America's roads. Make no mistake: drunk driving is a national public health crisis. Our sense of urgency is palpable: the longer we wait, the more people needlessly continue to die.

MADD is technology-neutral and is committed to NHTSA's development of standards and thresholds to determine the best solutions through a rulemaking process. On January 11, 2021, MADD submitted a response to NHTSA's Request for Information (RFI) on drunk driving prevention technology. I would like to submit an updated response for the hearing record. Our RFI update outlines 241 different technologies, most of which are already available. These technologies can be put into 3 broad categories: 1) driving performance monitoring technologies; 2) driver monitoring technologies; and 3) passive alcohol detection technologies.

#### Driving Performance Monitoring Technologies

This type of technology is already available on cars. For example, all new cars include an Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS). This is a series of sensors that look at the world on the outside of the car. Usually, it is used for Lane Assist, emergency braking, blind spot warning, etc. But it can be, and has been by some auto makers, programmed to detect erratic/reckless driving. Most drunk drivers,

including the one who killed my family, exhibit reckless driving prior to a collision. Because the hardware is already on all new cars, enabling this existing tech is a one-time software change, the incremental cost to enable ADAS Systems to prevent drunk and impaired driving is \$0.

### Driver Monitoring Technologies

The second category is driver monitoring technologies. Many new cars - Volvo, Jaguar Land Rover, Subaru, Lexus (in certain places around the world), Mercedes, BMW, Cadillac, etc., are already equipped with driver monitoring technologies. These technologies are based on cameras that focus on the condition of the driver. Usually these systems are programmed just to detect drowsy or distracted driving. But these technologies also have the capability to accurately detect the dilation of eyes, and the distracted perspectives of drunk and impaired drivers. Currently, this adds about \$200 per car. If mandated on all cars, industry sources say the cost will drop to about \$100 per vehicle. Once again, if already installed on cars, this is just a one-time software change so the incremental cost would be \$0. The drunk driver who killed my family was served 22 drinks and had a BAC that was nearly four times the legal limit. I believe this technology would have prevented the drunk driver from killing my family.

### Passive Alcohol-Detection Technologies

The third category is passive alcohol-detection technologies. I'd like to make a clear distinction between "active" alcohol-detection technology and "passive" alcohol-detection technology. Active technology means the driver must actively breathe into a tube in order for the device to register BAC. This is the how ignition interlock technology works. In this way, it is considered an "active" tech because it requires an action. The industry has perfected "passive" technology that has the same capabilities as interlock technology but doesn't require an action on the part of the driver. Therefore it is "passive." This technology consists of tubes installed in the steering wheel which sucks in the breath of the driver and analyzes it for alcohol content. This tech is not currently installed on any vehicles, but we have been told it is production-ready. If mandated on all cars, industry sources say that it will cost about \$100/vehicle. The BAC of the man who killed my family was four times the illegal limit. This technology would have stopped him. My family – five beautiful souls – would still be here.

We have the tools and technology to change the world, and we also have public support. It's time to ACT. Americans support Congressional action to require drunk driving prevention technology as standard equipment in all new vehicles, according to a new nationwide poll conducted by Ipsos for MADD. The survey found that 9 of 10 Americans support technology that is integrated into a car's electronics to prevent drunk driving (89% say it is a good or very good idea), while 3 of 4 (77%) back Congressional action to require this technology in all new vehicles. More broadly, 8 of 10 (83%) believe that new auto safety features should be standard in vehicles as they become available, not part of optional equipment packages.

### **Equity and Enforcement: Technology Is Part of the Solution**

As we examine the auto industry's tremendous technological capabilities, I'd like to take a moment to recognize what's happening in our nation with law enforcement and communities of color. And how technology solutions can also play a role in reducing the role of implicit bias in traffic enforcement. As a woman of color, I am very sensitive to the challenging issues that lay before us as a nation. Systemic racism impacts every facet of life for people of color, and traffic safety enforcement is no exception. MADD recognizes the need for traffic safety enforcement reform and we want to be a part of real solutions. We are committed to finding short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions to prevent enforcement practices that unjustly target black and brown people.

We are better positioned today than ever before to eliminate risk posed by drunk drivers in an equitable manner by using technology. While advancing fair and just traffic safety enforcement remains vital and urgent, advanced drunk driving prevention technology does not notice a person's race or ethnicity. Impairment prevention technology has no implicit bias.

In addition to saving lives, these innovative technologies could reduce the need for traffic safety enforcement. MADD believes that fair and just traffic safety enforcement is crucial, and we have been saddened and outraged by the killing of unarmed Black men by police. We look forward to working with the Committee through the reauthorization of NHTSA's programs, with the goal of promoting best practices, and encouraging reform.

### **The Beginning of the End of Drunk Driving**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on this important issue. Your leadership and the leadership of this committee is to be commended. We can work together to save thousands of lives every year.

For 40 years, MADD has given a voice to millions of crash victims and their families. We have taken our collective pain and turned it into action, with the goal of no more victims. We have made tremendous progress, reducing drunk driving deaths by over 52 percent. But this isn't good enough.

I am here today, in honor of my family, hoping to continue the work to which my baby sister committed her life: saving lives. Rima was a formidable force. She was my hero. But even heroes -- especially heroes -- hurt from the pain that they witness. Very few were fortunate enough to know the vulnerable side of Rima. She maintained a fierce and stoic facade, and she took very seriously the fact that her strength is what everyone, including her family, relied on. It was her practice to phone me on her drives home from a difficult day at work; especially on the days she would have had to diagnose a patient with a terminal illness or, worse yet, when she had lost a patient. It was ALWAYS personal to her. During those conversations, she would unpack her pain with me. It was her way of seeking help to carry it, so that she could be what her family needed her to be by the time she had made it home. Today, I speak before you, in my humble attempt to continue my promise to unpack, and carry, and help heal for Rima.

My family should not have died. If Congress and the auto industry can get technology into vehicles that can keep drunk people from driving, we can make sure that others don't ever have to experience the horror that we did on January 6, 2019.

Let us prevent further tragedies before they come home for many others. The opportunity to save lives is not only afforded to those, like Rima, who choose the noble profession of medicine. It is an opportunity we ALL have, and it is within immediate reach. I look forward to working with the Members of this respected Committee to save 10,000 lives a year by passing S. 1331, the RIDE Act. I hope you will join Senators Lujan and Scott in moving this forward. Thank you.