

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 17, 2018

Ms. Heidi King
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator King,

We write to express our grave concerns following the crash that occurred on October 6th in Schoharie, New York, involving the Prestige Limousine and Chauffeur Service that resulted in the deaths of 20 individuals. This crash, which is the deadliest transportation accident in nine years, demonstrates the troubling loophole that exists in current federal vehicle safety standards for stretch limousines. We strongly urge you to work with the National Transportation Safety Board in their investigation of this incident, and to work quickly to implement any recommendations arising from that investigation, including other regulatory changes that would improve the safety of stretch limousines.

Due to the way they are produced, limousines lack many of the modern safety features required on passenger vehicles. Safety features of a normal car, which are tested by the manufacturer and certified that they meet all existing federal regulations, are rendered useless when a car is converted into a limousine. To make a limousine, an individual vehicle is cut in two and lengthened following the instructions of a kit. As a result, stretch limousines do not have side airbags, are not required to be crash tested, and are not required to meet the safety regulations of a car when it comes to side-impacts or rollovers.

Some limousine manufacturers will install anti-intrusion beams inside the door and side panels of a limousine, which can be similar to safety pillars required in cars and help to lessen the impact when a vehicle is hit from the side. However, there are no regulations specific to the installation of pillars and nothing to ensure that these pillars prevent passenger compartment intrusion. Limousines are not equipped with side airbags, and passengers are not required to wear seatbelts. We urge you to evaluate the construction of stretch limousines to address these safety gaps and how federal safety standards could be improved. We also ask that you begin a study on improving passenger protections, including – but not limited to – the utilization of side airbags and seatbelts to lessen the dangers associated with a crash.

These vehicles are also currently subjected to very minimal safety inspections. Limousines are only required to pass a normal vehicle inspection, which have specific requirements depending on the state. Those inspections are designed to evaluate whether certain components of a vehicle, such as brakes, are properly functioning, but do not ensure that the vehicle is structurally sound. We urge you to develop specific requirements to inspect for structural safety once a stretch limousine has been constructed to ensure that only structurally sound vehicles are allowed on the road.

We also ask that you review whether limousines should be classified as commercial vehicles, as buses are classified as commercial vehicles, and subject to requirements under the Motor Carrier Safety Act. If all limousines were classified as commercial vehicles, drivers would be required to carry a commercial driver's license, undergo more extensive training, and limousines would be subjected to rigorous inspection, repair, and maintenance regulation. Many limousines are not considered commercial vehicles, as they advertise as carrying 9 or fewer passengers which ensures they are exempt from Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulations. However, as we have just seen in the Schoharie accident, limousines may carry many more than 9 passengers. For this reason, we ask that you review the current standards that exempt them from adhering to FMCSA regulations.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We hope to prevent the tragic loss of life in future accidents, and aim to work together to ensure that limousines are as safe as possible.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator