December 17, 1998

The Honorable Ricardo Martinez, M.D., Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Dr. Martinez:

Enclosed is a petition for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to amend Federal motor vehicle safety standard 208 to require an effective safety belt inducement in all new motor vehicles. It has been a quarter century since the unfortunate experience with safety belt ignition interlocks. You have an obligation to seriously reconsider the potential of vehicle-based systems to substantially increase belt use.

The advantages of an acceptable, effective belt use inducement are substantial. It would reduce fatalities by at least 7,000 per year and would reduce injuries comparably. It would permit the agency to respond favorably to the industry’s desire that NHTSA rescind the unbelted test in FMVSS 208. It would end the controversy over the use of safety belt use laws as an excuse for stopping minority drivers.

Donald Friedman and I have also submitted comments to the docket of the advanced air bag rulemaking notice that build on the concept of an effective safety belt use inducement. We believe that a simpler and more effective approach to reducing inflation induced injuries can be based on this concept.

In the interest of advancing motor vehicle safety, we look forward to your favorable consideration of our petition and of our comments on the rulemaking proposal. Action that could make belt use nearly universal in the United States is long overdue, and would be an important legacy of your tenure.

Sincerely,

Carl E. Nash, Ph.D.