

Statement of Laura Christian, birth mother of 16-year-old Amber Marie Rose, victim of a General Motors ignition switch defect in a July 2005 crash in Maryland, in response to the General Motors Settlement with the Department of Justice

September 17, 2005

Today is a horrifically painful day for all of us who have lost a loved one because General Motors (GM) covered up a deadly defect. We buried our loved ones because GM buried a deadly defect. And yet today all GM has to do is write another check to escape. We can't escape – every day I am missing a daughter and at least 123 other families are missing mothers, fathers, children and friends.

There are people at GM who made decisions that caused these deaths. Yet, they will not suffer any consequences. If a person kills someone because he decided to drive drunk, he will go to jail. Yet the GM employees who caused 124 deaths are able to hide behind a corporation because our laws are insufficient. It must change.

Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Chairman John Thune (R-SD) had a prime opportunity to make this change. Yet, he chose not to include a provision giving the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) the authority to impose criminal penalties on corporate officers who knowingly conceal defects that lead to death and injury in the surface transportation reauthorization bill, the DRIVE Act (H.R. 22). Right now House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) is drafting the House bill. I urge Congressman Upton to stand up for our loved ones and include a criminal penalties provision in his bill.

Senator Thune's and Congressman Upton's committees have held more than a dozen hearings on the problems with motor vehicle recalls. It is time for some action. I commend Senators Bill Nelson (D-FL), Ed Markey (D-MA) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) for including a criminal penalties provision in their bill, the Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 2015 (S. 1743), and I urge Congress to advance this bill today. If our leaders cower to the pressures of corporate lobbyists and corporate contributions, cover-ups will continue and the blood will be on their hands.

Monetary fines are grossly inadequate and will never serve as a serious deterrent to corporations purposely concealing defects that cause deaths and injuries. But jail time will. While nothing can bring my daughter back, we need a system where auto executives are accountable to the public and not just corporate profits.

I can be reached at 202-431-3435 for further comment.

Thank you.