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March 31, 2026

The Honorable Jonathan Morrison
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Administrator Morrison,

I write to urge the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to investigate the remote assistance operations of autonomous vehicle (AV) companies. AV companies rely on human Remote Assistance Operators (RAOs) — located remotely from the vehicle — to help guide their self-driving vehicles when they encounter a difficult or uncertain driving situation. As revealed in my recent investigation of RAOs, which I have appended to this letter, the companies' policies, standards, and qualifications for RAOs vary widely and raise serious and unresolved safety, transparency, and accountability issues. This practice demands immediate federal scrutiny.

Generally unknown to the public prior to my investigation, RAOs play an important and little-understood role in the AV industry. RAOs generally do not teleoperate the vehicle but instead provide guidance or approvals when an autonomous driving system encounters a dangerous or uncertain driving situation. RAOs are not inherently unsafe and may, in fact, be an important redundancy mechanism to help ensure self-driving vehicles operate safely. But without proper oversight and safeguards, RAOs can introduce new safety risks to AVs.

For that reason, in February 2026, I launched a detailed inquiry into the use of RAOs by seven major AV companies. My investigation turned up several concerning issues and left important questions unresolved. Notably, although AV companies routinely tout their vehicles as fully autonomous, the companies refused to disclose the frequency with which RAOs intervene in autonomous driving operations, which raises questions about their AVs' true level of autonomy. The investigation also revealed varying practices around the location of RAOs, their qualifications, and latency standards for remote assistance connections. These results reveal an industry that is deeply opaque about its reliance on human operators, resistant to meaningful accountability, and in urgent need of federal oversight.

Autonomous vehicle companies promise fewer road deaths, but this promise depends on an honest accounting of how these vehicles operate. The findings of my investigation make clear that AV companies are deploying complex, human-assisted driving systems on public roads

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while avoiding full transparency about the role those human operators play. The public deserves a full accounting. I therefore request that NHTSA open an investigation into the remote assistance operations of AV companies operating on U.S. roads.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further and provide any additional information that would help your review.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator