

March 5, 1955

Mr. Louis C. Romell
Chairman, Committee on Transportation
Wisconsin State Assembly
State Capitol, Madison, Wis.

Dear Assemblyman Romell:

Perhaps it takes only the ghastly occurrence of a serious automobile accident to rouse people from their apathy to highway safety. Unfortunately, the incident that happened to provoke this letter occurs all too often, and when it does may touch the hearts and feelings of many people beyond those who suffer injuries directly.

The circumstances of this particular accident suggest that the availability of a safety belt might have made all the difference. I realize that there are many technicalities involved with this subject, and I also know that the legislature is preoccupied with many other pressing problems. For this reason we are making a special plea that proposed legislation on the equipment of new cars with safety belts be given the most careful, unbiassed attention by your committee. It would be impossible for any man of compassion to approach this kind of issue with a partisan spirit, and I know that will not be a consideration. I do fear that the public is not yet well enough informed for the interest to be expressed that would certainly follow more extensive discussion and hearings. Perhaps there is also some misunderstanding that there might be an attempt to compel, by legislation, the invariable use of safety belts, to which, naturally, there may be some resistance. These issues of technical merit and public interest will be resolved if the matter is fully probed. We are urging that it be given a high priority among the possible means of improving highway safety conditions.

It is impossible, and would be irrelevant, to convey the personal anguish which this accident has visited on us. The point is just that things like this "happen all the time".

Mr. Wright is a student in this department, a research assistant, and a scientist of high promise. His condition still does not allow any prediction of the outcome. The signatories of the accompanying informal petition are just a few of his friends, colleagues and teachers, including virtually all of the professorial staff of the Genetics Department. These signatures are not, I believe, an unconsidered emotional reaction, but a temperate conclusion that safety belts may be one important means of reducing the toll of the highways.

P.S. Mr. Peter Day was one of the mentioned survivors of the accident. I believe he would be available for testimony, if evidence of that sort would be helpful to the committee in any way.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
(Professor of Genetics
University of Wisconsin)

Dear Mr. Romell:

Please accept the enclosure as a postscript to my letter of March 5. The signatures belong to a number of the staff at the Department of Biochemistry, but are entered, of course, in a purely private capacity.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
507 Eugenia Avenue.