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May 31, 2002

United States Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
400, 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Room 5232  
Washington, D.C. 20590

OFFICE  
DEFECTS INVESTIGATION

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RECEIVED

Attn: ODI (Office of Defects and Investigation)

**566231**

Dear Sir/Madam:

This letter is to report an incident which occurred involving my five year old son, [REDACTED] and my 2002 GMC Yukon Denali, identification number 1GKEK63U02J [REDACTED]

On January 24, 2002 I was parked in the Maclay School (3737 North Meridian Road Tallahassee, Florida 32312) front parking area to retrieve school papers. My two sons, age nine and five were sitting in the back seat of the vehicle. The vehicle was not running and I was in possession of the keys. I was outside of my vehicle in the immediate location of my vehicle. Many parents and parked vehicles were present within feet of my vehicle. The area is Maclay School's designated student drop off and pick up area.

My nine-year-old son began calling for me to return to the vehicle immediately, yelling, "hurry, [REDACTED] is in trouble!". I ran to the vehicle and found my five year old son who was in the left side back seat behind the driver's seat, *dangling* from the seatbelt retractor at the top of the left back seat door. The left rear seatbelt buckle was unattached. The seatbelt was retracted and *locked* in place with the belt wrapped once around my son's waist. This occurred rapidly and without releasing the entrapment. My son was suspended from the seatbelt retractor with the seatbelt wrapped once around his abdomen. His feet and his bottom were unable to reach the seat. He was freely *dangling* from the seatbelt retractor.

[REDACTED] was very quiet and was trying to pull the belt down from his abdomen. I noticed his legs were mottled. I frantically tried to loosen the seatbelt, unsuccessfully. I tried to put my finger between his abdominal skin and the seatbelt and could not do so. [REDACTED] started to cry. I screamed for help and a Maclay School transportation staff, [REDACTED] was already on his way over to the vehicle. Two Maclay maintenance staff, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were also on their way over to the vehicle. They tried to free my son, and then immediately cut the seatbelt with a knife. The Headmaster of Maclay School [REDACTED] was present and witnessed the incident.

[REDACTED] appeared to be without injury, although quiet and frightened. We proceeded home. I questioned him

regarding the incident and his only comments were “I put the seatbelt around me and I couldn’t get it off” and “I am OK”.

To be honest, I could not believe this had just happened. I kept thinking, *what if we had been in a place where nobody had a knife or scissors to cut the seatbelt and what if the seatbelt had been wrapped around his neck?* I was very grateful for the assistance I had received and for the apparent safety of my son. I do, however, now carry a pair of scissors in my vehicle.

Two evenings later, my husband noticed a fairly large bulge in [REDACTED] left groin while bathing him. The hernia was definitely present, and symptomatic at times. [REDACTED] had discomfort with abdominal straining and we knew this would require surgical intervention. We made an appointment with our general surgeon, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and subsequently proceeded with surgical repair of [REDACTED] left inguinal hernia and hydrocele. The operation was scheduled for February 22, 2002, however, was postponed due to an acute illness. [REDACTED] recovered from pneumonia that required hospital intervention, and the operation took place on April 19, 2002 at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital.

My initial contact with our local dealer was on March 5, 2002 with Mr. Kevin White, Manager of the Service Department of Proctor Pontiac-GMC-Cadillac at 3122 E. Mahan Drive Tallahassee, Florida 32308. He was courteous in a business fashion. Following my detailed

explanation of the incident, Mr. White examined the seatbelt and his initial response was “kids will be kids” and “the locking mechanism of the seatbelt is a safety feature”. I waited in their service department waiting room for them to locate and order parts. No further questions were asked of me, and to my knowledge no report was made. Mr. White then came out to inform me the order had been placed, and that I would be contacted to make a service appointment when the parts arrived stating “the seatbelt and retractor replacement will cost you about two hundred dollars”.

The two hundred dollars was not the issue. The issue was ***the safety of my child, injury to my child and the possibility of a repeat occurrence with resultant injury to another child.*** I could not believe that no one even inquired about [REDACTED] or even more so seemed the least bit interested in reporting this to GMC for safety evaluation. I can tell you that after fourteen years of higher education followed by thirteen years of medical practice in caring for sick and injured children, I was appalled by the ***lack of interest*** in documenting, reporting, or taking steps to prevent future recurrences. I am a Board Certified Anesthesiologist and Fellowship trained in Pediatric Anesthesia. I quickly assessed the critical nature of having the tight belt around [REDACTED] lower abdomen. It was immediately apparent to me a great deal of pressure was being exerted by the seatbelt on his abdomen.

I did not return to the Proctor Service Department. I called the GMC Customer Assistance Center in Detroit and was

referred to GMC Product Allegations. I was given a file number of [REDACTED] I was subsequently referred to and contacted by Susan Braun with ESIS General Motors Claims and given a new file number of [REDACTED] I was unable to speak with Ms. Braun directly, but left a message with her office that John Northen, their field investigator in Northern Florida, had contacted me. Mr. Northen stated that he would be in Tallahassee in mid June to evaluate this incident.

I would like this seatbelt safety issue to be addressed for the 2002 GMC Yukon Denali.

I am very blessed to have a healthy son, who has apparently physically recovered from this trauma.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Tallahassee, Florida

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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