

February 7, 2003

VH, HUD and Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Members
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

We are writing to urge you to oppose adding any language, in any form, to the FY03 VA, HUD and Independent Agencies Appropriations bill which would amend Title 23 of the U.S. Code to allow “electric personal mobility devices,” marketed as “Segway” vehicles – essentially large, motorized scooters that can travel up to 20 miles per hour and weigh approximately 70 pounds– on sidewalks built or maintained with federal funds.

Legislation containing this language, S. 2024, was approved by the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee by voice vote in the last Congress on April 25, 2002, with two senators voting against the bill. The vote occurred without the benefit of any hearings to allow discussion of safety, environmental or any other issues. This language was inserted into the House VA HUD Independent Agencies Appropriations bill as well. To date, there still have been no hearings focusing on the safety implications of the Segway device. Even the bill's supporters have acknowledged that the safety concerns about the legislation have not been addressed.

Segway may indeed prove a useful new mode of transportation. However, safety and other issues related to this device must be fully explored by the Congress before these vehicles are given unfettered access to sidewalks or other public walkways and thoroughfares. A March 1, 2002 *Wall Street Journal* article quotes Charles Trainor, Chief Traffic Engineer for the city of Philadelphia, stating that if a Segway “hits a pedestrian, there will be serious damage. I would not be in favor of changing the law.”

We urge you to oppose the addition of any language to the FY03 VA HUD Independent Agencies Appropriation bill that would exempt the Segway from regulation or give the device full access to sidewalks at this time. Before making any decision that would exempt the Segway from regulation, at a minimum, there must be a hearing on this issue. Witnesses would bring a wide range of expertise in fields such as traffic and pedestrian safety, medicine, emergency care, engineering, consumer protection, and environmental impacts.

The potential risks of injury to children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and other pedestrians must be fully considered before any new technology is given a blanket exemption from current law. Technology must be used in appropriate settings under appropriate conditions if it is to improve the quality of life for all citizens. A hearing would give Senators a better sense of the long-term safety and environmental implications of this device.

As organizations dedicated to working to promote product safety, we urge you to reject efforts to rush through legislative language that would give the Segway free reign to travel on any sidewalk built or maintained with federal funds until the matter receives closer study and deliberation.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

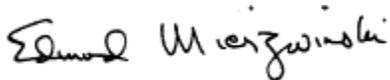
Sincerely,



Rachel Weintraub
Assistant General Counsel
Consumer Federation of America



Sally Greenberg
Senior Product Safety Counsel
Consumers Union



Consumer Program Director
U.S. Public Interest Research Group