



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Walsh, Chair
The Honorable Larry Gagne, Vice Chair
House Transportation Committee
General Court of New Hampshire
107 North Main Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Chairman Walsh and Vice Chairman Gagne:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical, public health and law enforcement groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent traffic crashes and deaths, reduce injuries and curb costs, urges you to oppose House Bill (HB) 628. This legislation will elevate speeds on certain roadways from 55 to 60 miles per hour (mph) and from 65 to 70 mph on others and will endanger all road users.

In 2020 despite a steep drop in vehicle miles traveled, 42 percent at its lowest point compared to the average in 2019, the number of traffic fatalities in New Hampshire remained consistent with 2019, indicating a spike in the traffic fatality rate.ⁱ Reckless driving resulting in deadlier crashes has been identified as a cause, and the lethal combination of a rise in speeding and impaired driving and a decrease in seat belt use has been reported.ⁱⁱ Clearly, these dangerous issues need to be addressed and certainly should not be exacerbated by increasing speed limits.

Speeding in New Hampshire was a contributing factor in 35 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2019, a significantly higher proportion than the national average of 26 percent (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)). Excess speed can contribute to both the frequency and severity of motor vehicle crashes and is especially damaging to vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and bicyclists. Early reports note that pedestrian fatalities nearly doubled in the state in 2020 compared to 2019.ⁱⁱⁱ

Small changes in speed can have a big impact on safety. Recent crash tests demonstrated that modest five to ten mph increases in speed can have a severe impact on a driver's risk of injury or even death.^{iv} Speeding also reduces a driver's ability to react to emergencies created by driver inattention, unsafe maneuvers of other vehicles, roadway hazards, vehicle issues (such as tire blowouts) or hazardous weather conditions.

Research and statistics consistently and convincingly show speeding is a major safety problem and raising speed limits results in more traffic fatalities. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), "People often drive faster than the speed limit, and if the limit is raised, they will go faster still. Research shows that when speed limits are raised, speeds go up, as do fatal crashes."^v

Speeding is also costly. In 2019 alone, 9,479 speeding-related fatalities were reported nationally. Speed related crashes cause \$52 billion in economic costs and \$203 billion in comprehensive costs annually based on 2010 figures. These costs account for 21 percent of all economic costs and 24 percent of comprehensive costs from motor vehicle crashes.^{vi} Updated for inflation alone, in 2021 the expenses amount to \$63 billion in economic costs and \$245 billion in comprehensive costs.^{vii} In New Hampshire, the annual economic cost due to motor vehicle crashes is nearly \$1.4 billion (NHTSA).

Drivers acknowledge that excess speed is dangerous yet there is a disconnect in their actions. Approximately half of drivers surveyed said they have driven 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway in the past month, despite the fact that four out of five surveyed say doing so is moderately to extremely dangerous.^{viii}

We urge you to advance measures to protect road users and keep them out of emergency rooms and hospitals, especially at a time when our Nation is struggling with the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19, as well as to curb the expenditure of taxpayer dollars on associated costs. We respectfully request you to reject HB 628.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase
President

cc: House Transportation Committee Members

-
- ⁱ U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Changes in Mobility By State, Available here: <https://www.bts.gov/content/changes-mobility-state>; and Valley News, “In the pandemic, cars on the road decrease, but fatal crashes don’t,” December 12, 2020, Available here: <https://www.vnews.com/Fatal-crashes-in-VT-NH-tick-up-37697676>
- ⁱⁱ Valley News, “In the pandemic, cars on the road decrease, but fatal crashes don’t,” December 12, 2020, Available here: <https://www.vnews.com/Fatal-crashes-in-VT-NH-tick-up-37697676>
- ⁱⁱⁱ New Hampshire Union Leader, “Another COVID complication? Pedestrian fatalities rise,” December 6, 2020, https://www.unionleader.com/2020s-fatal-pedestrian-accidents/pdf_5a842c68-7788-52fd-bf14-6977d1adfa57.html
- ^{iv} Impact of Speeds on Drivers and Vehicles – Results from Crash Tests, AAA Foundation for Safety, Humanetics, and IIHS, Jan. 2021, available at <https://www.iihs.org/api/datastoredocument/bibliography/2218>
- ^v Speed.” Topic Overview. IIHS. Web.
- ^{vi} The Economic and Societal Impact Of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2010 (Revised), NHTSA, May 2015 (Revised), DT HS 812 013.
- ^{vii} CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, available at https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.
- ^{viii} 2019 Traffic Safety Culture Index, AAA, June 2020, available at <https://aaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-Traffic-Safety-Culture-Index.pdf>