



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Charles H. Clements, Chair
The Honorable Chandler Swope, Vice Chair
Senate Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
West Virginia Legislature
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Dear Chairperson Clements and Vice Chairperson Swope:

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 Senate Bill (SB) 331. This legislation will elevate speeds on certain highways to 80 miles per hour (mph) and will endanger all road users.

Speeding in West Virginia was a contributing factor in 33 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2019, a notably 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. Data finds that pedestrian fatalities rose 40 percent in the state in 2019 compared to 2018 (NHTSA).

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.ⁱ 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."ⁱⁱ

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.ⁱⁱⁱ Updated for inflation alone, in 2021 the expenses amount to \$63 billion in economic costs and \$245 billion in comprehensive costs.^{iv} In West Virginia, the annual economic cost due to motor vehicle crashes is nearly \$1.5 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.^v

We urge you to advance measures to protect road users and keep them out of emergency rooms and hospitals, especially as our Nation continues to struggle with the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19. We respectfully request you to reject SB 331.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase
President

cc: Senate Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Members

ⁱ 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>.

ⁱⁱ Speed.” Topic Overview. IIHS. Web.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Economic and Societal Impact Of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2010 (Revised), NHTSA, May 2015 (Revised), DT HS 812 013.

^{iv} CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, available at https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

^v 2019 Traffic Safety Culture Index, AAA, June 2020, available at <https://aaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-Traffic-Safety-Culture-Index.pdf>.