



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
& AUTO SAFETY

March 8, 2023

The Honorable Becky Duncan Massey, Chair  
The Honorable Mark Pody, Vice-Chair  
The Honorable Brent Taylor, Second Vice-Chair  
Senate Transportation and Safety Committee  
Tennessee General Assembly  
425 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue North  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Dear Chair Massey, Vice-Chair Pody and Vice-Chair Taylor:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), a coalition of consumer, safety, public health, law enforcement and medical groups, and insurance companies and organizations working to advance laws that prevent needless crashes, deaths and injuries and contain costs, opposes enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 1125/ House Bill (HB) 621. This legislation will permit an increase of the maximum speed limit from 70 to 75 miles per hour (mph) on controlled-access state and interstate highways across Tennessee, endangering state residents as well as visitors.

In 2021, speeding was a leading factor in traffic fatalities across the country and speeding related fatalities increased five percent from 2020.<sup>i</sup> According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in the first nine months of 2022, 1,006 people were killed as a result of traffic crashes on Tennessee roadways.<sup>ii</sup> Speeding contributed to 15 percent of traffic fatalities in the state in 2020.<sup>iii</sup> Excess speed impacts both the frequency and severity of motor vehicle crashes and proves especially dangerous for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, bicyclists and roadside first responders who lack the protective structure of a vehicle.

Additionally, speeding 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. Higher speeds will result in more preventable fatalities as well as serious and expensive injuries. Traffic crashes are not only devastating to individuals and families, but they are also costly. In 2019, the economic cost of motor vehicle crashes in Tennessee surpassed \$10 billion, which is equivalent to \$1,472 per resident, placing Tennessee within the top ten states for highest per capita costs due to traffic crashes.<sup>iv</sup> During the same year, crashes in which at least one driver was speeding cost our Nation more than \$46 billion.<sup>v</sup>

Research and statistics consistently and convincingly show speeding is a major safety problem, and raising speed limits increases traffic fatalities. Even seemingly modest speed limit changes can have significant impacts on overall traffic safety. Crash tests conducted in 2019 showed that modest five to 10 mph increases in speed can have a severe impact on a driver's risk of injury or even death.<sup>vi</sup> According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), "Raising speed limits leads to more deaths. 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."<sup>vii</sup>

Advancing SB 1125/HB 621 will cause more death and destruction on Tennessee roads. We urge you to reject this legislation and prioritize the safety of Tennessee's families.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

cc: Senate Transportation and Safety Committee Members

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- <sup>i</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2020, NHTSA, May 2022, DOT HS 813 298, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813298>; and Traffic Safety Facts 2020 Data: Speeding, NHTSA, June 2022, DOT HS 813 320, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813320>
- <sup>ii</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities for the First 9 Months (January – September) of 2022, NHTSA, December 2022, DOT HS 813 406, Available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813406>
- <sup>iii</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Speeding, NHTSA, June 2022, DOT HS 813 320, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813320>
- <sup>iv</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, December 2022, DOT HS 813 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>
- <sup>v</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, December 2022, DOT HS 813 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>
- <sup>vi</sup> 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>
- <sup>vii</sup> “Speed.” Topic Overview. IIHS. Web.