April 24, 2023

The Honorable Martin M. Looney, Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Matthew D. Ritter, Speaker of the House
Connecticut State Legislature
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear President Looney and Speaker Ritter:

As leading public health and safety organizations working to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent deaths and injuries and contain crash costs, we urge you to support enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 1082. This legislation will make Connecticut's roads safer for all by lowering the limit for blood alcohol concentration (BAC) while driving from .08 to .05 percent.

Traffic crashes are a deadly and costly threat to Connecticut families and visitors to the state. In the first nine months of 2022, 284 people were needlessly killed on state roads, according to data released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).[i] This is a nearly 17 percent increase in fatalities compared to the same period in 2021.[ii] New data from NHTSA finds that 298 people were killed on roads in Connecticut in 2021.[iii] Moreover, traffic fatalities cost the state more than $6 billion each year which is equivalent to $1,712 in costs to each resident in the state.[iv] These costs are noticeably higher than the national average of $1,035 per person. These serious and expensive crashes require urgent attention and sound solutions.

In Connecticut, 38 percent of traffic fatalities involved an alcohol-impaired driver in 2021.[v] The state places in the top ten states in the U.S. for its high percentage of drunk driving fatalities.[vi] Lowering the BAC limit for drivers is a proven way to curb impaired driving across all levels, high to low BAC, and prevent crashes, yet it is underused in the U.S. Over two decades of international studies have shown that when a country lowers BAC limits from .08 to .05 percent, alcohol-related fatal and injury crashes decrease between five and 10 percent.[vii]

Most adults are significantly impaired at .05 percent BAC as demonstrated by research. They exhibit reduced coordination, decreased ability to track moving objects, difficulty steering, and diminished response to emergency driving situations.[viii] In studies, drivers with BACs between .05 to .079 percent are at least seven times more likely to be killed in a vehicle crash than drivers with no alcohol in their system.[ix]

Last year, the NHTSA released a study, *Evaluation of Utah's .05 BAC Per Se Law*, that provides critical data on the success of Utah's .05 percent BAC law. It finds that Utah experienced a nearly 20 percent drop in traffic fatalities in 2019 (248), the first year the law was in effect, compared to 2016 (281), the last year before the law was enacted.[x] This improvement in roadway safety occurred despite an increase in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and outpaced neighboring states as well as the nation as a whole.

Opponents may state that lowering the BAC will reduce alcohol sales and endanger certain businesses, but this assertion is not supported by experience or data.[xi] In fact, the Utah study found that state revenues from taxes related to the hospitality industry continued to rise, and tourism increased. Additionally, studies show that when states lowered their BAC limits from .10 to .08 percent, there were no adverse impacts on the operation of the criminal justice system. This has been affirmed by criminal justice experts in Utah, as well as the Utah study which documents the fact that arrests due to drunk driving did not spike nor was the criminal justice system overwhelmed.

Approximately 30 percent of all traffic fatalities nationwide involve an alcohol-impaired driver, indicating progress on curbing drunk driving must be accelerated. If all states adopted a .05 percent BAC or lower law, our nation would experience an 11 percent decline in fatal alcohol crashes and 1,790 lives would be saved.[xii] A national poll by the Texas Medical Center Health Policy Institute found 55 percent of Americans approve lowering the BAC limit while driving to .05 percent.[xiii]

Each person killed in a preventable alcohol-related crash on Connecticut roads forever changes the lives of families and communities. The data are clear, the lifesaving benefits are certain, the support is documented and the justification for action is compelling. We urge you to take this critical step to seriously address the death and injury toll of alcohol-impaired driving by supporting SB 1082.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Amy Cohen, Co-Founder
Families for Safe Streets

Natalie A. Draisin, Director
North American Office & UN Representative
FIA Foundation

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
Kids and Car Safety

Marcus Kowal and Mishel Eder, Co-Founders
Liam's Life Foundation
Parents of Liam Mikael Kowal

Bob Garguilo, Executive Director-New England Region
Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Lorraine Martin, President & CEO
National Safety Council

Stephen Hargarten, MD, MPH, Founding President
Society for the Advancement of Violence and Injury Research

Leah Shahum, Founder and Director
Vision Zero Network

Honorable T. Bella Dinh-Zarr, Former Vice Chair
National Transportation Safety Board
Co-founder, *.05 Saves Lives* Coalition

Thomas M. Louizou, Former Regional Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Co-founder, *.05 Saves Lives* Coalition

cc: The Honorable Bob Duff, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Kevin Kelly, Senate Republican Leader
The Honorable Jason Rojas, House Majority Leader
The Honorable Vincent Candelora, House Minority Leader

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[i] National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, December). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities for the first 9 months (January–September) of 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 406). NHTSA.
[ii] National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2022, December). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities for the first 9 months (January–September) of 2022* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 406). NHTSA.
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[v] Stewart, T. (2023, April). *Overview of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2021* (Report No. DOT HS 813 435). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
[vi] Traffic Safety Facts 2020 Data: Alcohol-Impaired Driving, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 294, April 2022, available at: https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813294
[vii] NTSB, *.05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts,* February 2017.
[viii] NTSB, *.05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts,* February 2017.
[ix] Fell, Jim C., Voas, Robert B, The effectiveness of a 0.05 blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit for driving in the United States, PIRE, June 2014, available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4448946/#:~:text=The%20risk%20of%20being%20involved,for%20drivers%20at%200.00%20BAC
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[xi] NTSB, *.05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts,* February 2017.
[xii] NORC: Fell JC & Scherer M, Estimation of the Potential Effectiveness of Lowering the Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) Limit for Driving from 0.08 to 0.05 Grams per Deciliter in the United States, 2017. Available at: https://bit.ly/2E5pIiq
[xiii] Governing.com, *How Drunk Is Too Drunk to Drive?* October 2018. Available at: https://bit.ly/2Et1r6C.