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FOR HIGHWAY
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FOUNDATION



Liam's Life



savir
Society for Advancement of
Violence and Injury Research



January 17, 2025

The Honorable Roger Goodman, Chair
The Honorable Tarra Simmons, Vice Chair
House Community Safety Committee
Washington State Legislature
Olympia, Washington 98504

Dear Chair Goodman and Vice Chair Simmons:

As representatives of leading public health and safety organizations working to advance roadway and auto safety laws that prevent deaths and injuries and contain crash costs, we urge you to support the enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 5067/House Bill (HB) 1315. This legislation will lower the *per se* limit of alcohol-impaired driving to .05 percent blood alcohol concentration (BAC), deter drunk driving and save lives.

Drunk driving is a deadly and costly threat to Washington families. In 2023, there were an estimated 813 fatalities on state roads according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) which would be the most deaths on Washington roads since 1990.ⁱ The Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) data show nearly half (400) of the state's traffic fatalities involved impaired driving in 2023.ⁱⁱ

In addition to the physical and emotional impact, these crashes impose a financial burden including on businesses. Traffic crashes cause \$6.3 billion of economic damage to Washington State annually which is equivalent to a "crash tax" of \$832 per resident each year according to a 2019 analysis.ⁱⁱⁱ Drunk driving crashes cost employers across the country \$8 billion each year with 81 percent of those costs coming in crashes while off the job.^{iv}

The impact of drunk driving is clearly measurable at .05 percent BAC by research which shows significant impairment.^v Drivers have reduced coordination, decreased ability to track moving objects, difficulty steering and diminished response to emergency situations.^{vi} The risk of being killed in a single-vehicle crash with BACs of .05 to .079 percent is up to 21 times higher than for drivers without measurable alcohol.^{vii}

Drunk driving clearly is a serious problem that requires urgent action. We must implement solutions that are strongly supported by research and the public health and safety community.^{viii} Advancing .05 percent BAC legislation will reduce dangerous drinking and driving across all levels of impairment, including high BAC, to prevent deaths and injuries. If all states adopted a .05 percent BAC or lower law, fatal alcohol crashes are estimated to decline 11 percent, and 1,790 lives would be saved each year.^{ix} Lowering the limit of BAC is a countermeasure successfully employed around the world but underused in the United States. More than 100 countries have .05 percent BAC or lower limits. In these countries average alcohol consumption is equal or higher to that in the United States, but they have less deaths caused by drunk driving.^x

Opponents may claim that lowering the BAC will impact the economy by decreasing alcohol sales, but reducing BAC limits does not discourage alcohol consumption.^{xi} It does discourage driving after drinking. Further, studies show that when states lowered their BAC limits from .10 to .08 percent, there were no adverse impacts on the criminal justice system. Similarly, when Utah reduced its BAC limit from .08 to .05 percent, alcohol sales and tourism went up while DUI arrests went down.^{xii}

The data are clear, the lifesaving benefits are certain and the justification for action is compelling. We urge you to take this critical step to seriously address and prevent drunk driving by advancing SB 5067/HB 1315. Every death caused by an alcohol-related crash on Washington roads forever changes the lives of families and communities, and can be prevented. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Natalie A. Draisin, Director, North American Office &
United Nations 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

Dennis Maughan, Executive Director, Pacific Northwest
Region
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

Lorraine Martin, President and CEO
National Safety Council

David A. Sleet, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus
College of Health San Diego State University

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

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
Trauma Foundation

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

Karen Sisson, Board Member
SAFE Coalition

Marilena Amoni, Former Associate Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Co-founder, *.05 Saves Lives* Coalition

Additional organizations that are not signers but recommend or support .05 percent BAC policy:

American Medical Association (AMA)
American Public Health Association (APHA)
Association for the Advancement of Automotive
Medicine (AAAM)
Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA)
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and
Medicine (NASEM)
National Road Safety Foundation
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)
Remove Intoxicated Drivers (RID)
Safe States Alliance
Society for Public Health Education
Transportation Alternatives
Vision Zero Network
World Health Organization (WHO)

cc: House Community Safety Committee members

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- i Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2023, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 561, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813561>.
- ii WTSC. (2024, August 8). *WTSC Urges Using Sober Ride Options to Get Home Safely* (press release) available [here](#).
- iii The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Feb. 2023, DOT HS 813 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.
- iv Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019; Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, available at <https://trafficsafety.org/road-safety-resources/public-resources/cost-of-motor-vehicle-crashes-to-employers-2019/>.
- v NTSB, .05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts, February 2017, available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOT/documents/dvisionzero/NTSB-05-SafetyBriefingMarch2019.pdf>.
- vi MADD, *What is .08?* Available at: <http://www.madd.org/drunk-driving/about/understanding-08.html>.
- vii 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.
- viii 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.
- ix NTSB Safety Compass, *Drink or Drive Pick One*: <https://safetycompass.wordpress.com/2019/04/29/drink-or-drive-pick-one/>.
- x 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/2E5pliq>.
- xi NTSB, .05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts, February 2017.
- xii Ibid.
- Leaver, Jennifer, *The State of Utah's Travel and Tourism Industry 2019*, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute University of Utah, September 2020. Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, Annual Reports 2018, 2019 and 2020, available at: <https://abc.utah.gov/about-dabc/annual-reports/>. 17th Annual DUI Report to the Utah Legislature, Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, 2019. Available at: <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2019/pdf/00004834.pdf>.