



January 13, 2025

The Honorable Manka Dhingra, Chair  
The Honorable Yasmin Trudeau, Vice Chair  
Senate Law & Justice Committee  
Washington State Legislature  
Olympia, Washington 98504

Dear Chair Dhingra and Vice Chair Trudeau:

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. 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.<sup>i</sup> The Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) data show nearly half (400) of the state's traffic fatalities involved drunk driving in 2023.<sup>ii</sup> The state's abhorrent toll from drunk driving far exceeds the national impact as nationwide, 32 percent of traffic fatalities involve a drunk driver.<sup>iii</sup>

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.<sup>iv</sup> 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.<sup>v</sup>

The impact of drunk driving is clearly measurable at .05 percent BAC by research which shows significant impairment.<sup>vi</sup> Drivers have reduced coordination, decreased ability to track moving objects, difficulty steering and diminished response to emergency situations.<sup>vii</sup> 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.<sup>viii</sup>

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.<sup>ix</sup> 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.<sup>x</sup> 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.<sup>xi</sup>

Opponents may claim that lowering the BAC will impact the economy by decreasing alcohol sales, but reducing BAC limits does not discourage alcohol consumption.<sup>xii</sup> 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.<sup>xiii</sup>

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. 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

Janette Fennell, Founder and President  
Kids and Car Safety

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director  
Trauma Foundation

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

cc: Senate Law & Justice 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 Traffic Safety Facts: Summary of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes, NHTSA, September 2024, DOT HS 813 643, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813643>.
- iv 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>.
- v 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/>.
- vii NTSB, .05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts, February 2017, available [here](#).
- viii MADD, *What is .08?* Available at: <http://www.madd.org/drunk-driving/about/understanding-08.html>.
- 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.
- 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/2E5p1iq>.
- xi NTSB, .05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts, February 2017.
- xii NTSB, .05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts, February 2017.
- xiii 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>.