



January 31, 2025

The Honorable Neil Duram, Chair
The Honorable Denise Baum, Vice Chair
The Honorable Zack Wirth, Vice Chair
House Transportation Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, Montana 59620-0400

Dear Chair Duram, Vice Chair Baum and Vice Chair Wirth:

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 crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs, urges you to oppose House Bill (HB) 312. This legislation will permit an increase in speed limits to 75 miles per hour (mph) during daytime and 70 mph at night on certain national highways (with an exception for special speed zones), endangering state residents as well as visitors.

In 2022, 29 percent of all traffic fatalities in the U.S were speeding related.ⁱ In 2023 an estimated 206 people died in traffic crash crashes in Montana.ⁱⁱ Speeding is a major factor leading to traffic fatalities, contributing to 32 percent of traffic fatalities in the state in 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ Excess speed contributes to both the frequency and severity of motor vehicle crashes and proves especially dangerous for vulnerable road users such as motorcycle riders, work zone workers and roadside first responders who lack the protective structure of a vehicle.

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 Montana totaled \$1.1 billion which is equivalent to a \$1,024 per resident "crash tax".^{iv} When updated for inflation alone, in 2024 costs would equate to \$1.35 billion and \$1,255 respectively.^v During the same year, crashes in which at least one driver was speeding cost our nation more than \$46 billion.^{vi} In 2024 dollars that would be \$58 billion.^{vii}

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 huge impacts on overall traffic safety. Crash tests conducted in 2019 showed that five to 10 mph increases in speed can have a severe impact on a driver's risk of injury or even death.^{viii} 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."^{ix} A study found that from 1993-2017, a five-mph increase in state speed limits led to 37,000 more traffic deaths.^x Conversely lower speeds save lives. A 2022 study of speed limit reductions in Seattle, WA, found a five-mph decrease in the speed limit was associated with a 17 percent reduction in downtown crashes involving a police-reported injury.^{xi} Similarly, on high-capacity urban roads that are not expressways, Seattle experienced a 20 percent decline in crashes resulting in a police-reported injury.^{xii}

Advancing HB 312 will cause more death and destruction on Montana roads. We urge you to reject this legislation and prioritize the safety of Montana families.

Sincerely,

Peter Kurdock, General Counsel

cc: House Transportation Committee members

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- i NHTSA. (2024). Overview of Motor Vehicle Crashes in 2022. U.S. Department of Transportation, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813560>.
- ii 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>.
- iii State Traffic Safety Information for Montana (2022), NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/STSI/stsi.htm>.
- iv 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>.
- v CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, Jan. 2019 to Jan. 2024, available at <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.
- vi 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>.
- vii CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, Jan. 2019 to Jan. 2024, available at <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.
- viii 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/datastore/document/bibliography/2218>.
- ix “Speed.” Topic Overview. IIHS, available [here](#).
- x Farmer, Charles M., The effects of higher speed limits on traffic fatalities in the United States, 1993–2017, IIHS, April 2019; available at <https://www.iihs.org/api/datastore/document/bibliography/2188>.
- xi Effects of Lowering Speed Limits On Crash Severity in Seattle, Mar. 2023, IIHS, available at <https://www.iihs.org/api/datastore/document/bibliography/2279>.
- xii Ibid.