



NYS Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Transportation  
New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee and Senate Finance Committee  
February 15, 2022  
Testimony by Amy Cohen, Co-Founder, Families for Safe Streets

Thank you Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Kennedy, and Magnarelli for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of [Families for Safe Streets](#) and the entire New York State Safe Streets Coalition, we are grateful to be able to speak in support of the [Crash Victim Rights & Safety Act](#) and urge that adequate funding for these street safety measures be included in this year's budget.

I know firsthand the pain of traffic violence and how it can bisect lives and fracture families. It is 3,052 days since I kissed my 12-year-old son Sammy goodbye for the last time in the fall of his 8th grade year. 3,052 days since I touched his face, smelled his unique Sammy smell, saw him chatting with his sister, made him breakfast, and gave him a hug. That fateful day marks the time before. Instead, for the past eight years, at every holiday, meal and milestone, the cliché of the empty chair manifests our family's reality.

Every parent thinks their child is special, but Sammy really was amazing. He was curious about the world, loved to ask questions, carefully pondered the answers, and then seemed to always have an unquenchable desire to know more. He was a budding renaissance man and excelled in sports with fierce determination. He played soccer, baseball and hockey. Just weeks before he died, he rode his bike with my husband Gary in the NYC century ride, and at 12 years of age, was the youngest one to complete the 100-mile ride.

I thought my love was so strong that I could create an invisible shield around my children. Sammy was smart, street savvy and did not take risks. We lived in a safe, residential neighborhood where children played on the side streets, though I never allowed mine to do so. But every year, thousands of New York parents like me learn that their shield is fallible – that they cannot protect the ones they love from senseless deaths and life-altering injuries. No one should have to pay with their life just to get to their destination.

After Sammy’s death, I was so full of pain and it had to go somewhere or it would consume me. So I started speaking out. Soon, I joined with others and helped form Families for Safe Streets. Our mission is to confront the preventable epidemic of traffic violence and support those personally impacted. All of our members are like me – they have lost a family member or suffered a life-altering injury in a traffic crash. We are parents, children, partners, and siblings and represent the full breadth of New York’s diversity. We give a face to the numbers in this preventable public health crisis.

This year, FSS has joined forces with dozens of organizations and started the New York State Safe Streets Coalition – a new coalition that, in addition to FSS, is led by Albany Bicycle Coalition, Bike Walk Tompkins, GObike Buffalo, National Safety Council, New York Bicycling Coalition, Open Plans, Parks & Trails NY, Reconnect Rochester, Rochester Bicycling Club, Slow Roll Syracuse, Transportation Alternatives, and Walkable Albany.

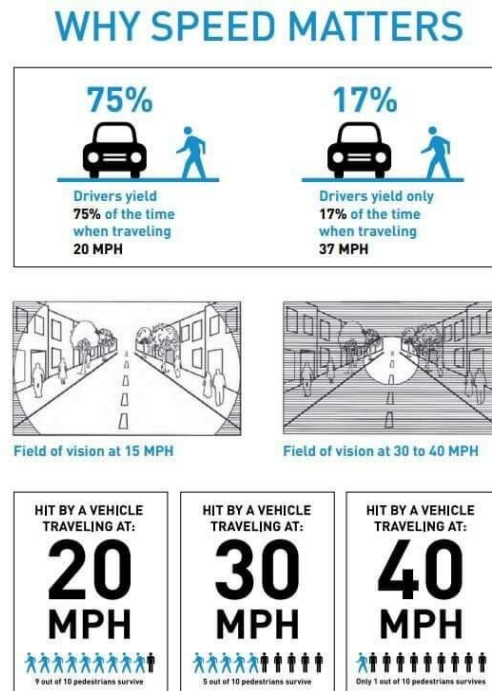
Together we are fighting to pass the Crash Victim Rights & Safe Act, seven life-saving bills, that will address the rising rates of injuries and fatalities on our streets. The CVRSA bills will redesign our streets with safety as a priority to protect all road users, address the speeding rampant on our streets, educate drivers on bike/pedestrian safety and provide support to those personally impacted, and specifically include:

<b>Statewide Speed Limit</b>	Authorizes cities, villages and towns (outside NYC) to reduce the speed limit to twenty-five miles per hour.	S02021 (May)	A01007 (Paulin)
<b>Sammy’s Law</b>	Allows lower life-saving speed limits in NYC	S524 (Hoylman)	A4655 (Gottfried)
<b>Complete Streets</b>	Increases state funding where the municipality agrees to fund a complete street design feature.	S3897 (Kennedy)	A8936 (Fahy)
<b>Complete Streets Maintenance</b>	Includes, when possible, complete street design features in resurfacing, maintenance and pavement recycling projects and further enable safe access to public roads for all users.	S5130 (Kennedy)	A7782 (Rivera)
<b>Safe Passage</b>	Require drivers pass bicyclists at a safe distance of min. 3 feet.	S4529 (Harckman)	A547 (Steck)
<b>DMV Pre-Licensing Course</b>	Educates NY drivers about safely interacting with vulnerable road users	S1078A (Gounardes)	A5084 (Gallagher)
<b>Crash Victim Bill of Rights</b>	Guarantee rights & a voice for crash victims and their loved ones in legal proceedings	S8152 (Hoylman)	A9152 (Glick)

The Statewide Speed Limit Bill and Sammy’s Law, named after my son, would allow municipalities to lower their speed limits. These two bills will help address serious death and injuries to pedestrians, considering that [30% of pedestrians](#) struck by motor

vehicles at an impact speed of 25 mph will sustain serious injury and about 12% will die. At [speeds above 40 mph](#), death is nearly certain. Every one mile per hour reduction in speed reduces fatal pedestrian crashes by [17%](#).

Lower speed limits in New York City, authorized by the State Legislature in 2014, contributed to a [36% decline](#) in pedestrians killed in the City and the lowest traffic fatalities, in 2018, in history since record-keeping began in 1910. From 2013–16 speeding-related fatalities decreased 32%. Lowering speed limits leads to people driving slower even without additional enforcement, including faster drivers, with data from cities including [Boston](#) and [Portland](#) proving it saves lives. Moreover, lower speed limits have widespread support. An [Emerson College poll](#) found that 68% of New York City residents support lowering the speed limit to 20 MPH, and 72% want the City to have authority to set its own speed limits.



The Complete Streets Funding Bill and the Complete Streets Maintenance Bill will promote the use of safe street designs. A [Complete Street](#) is a roadway planned and designed to consider the safe, convenient access and mobility of all roadway users of all ages and abilities. [Complete Street roadway design](#) features include sidewalks, lane striping, bicycle lanes, paved shoulders suitable for use by bicyclists, signage, crosswalks, pedestrian control signals, bus pull-outs, curb cuts, raised crosswalks, ramps, and traffic calming measures.

The CVRSA also focuses on protecting those most vulnerable using our roadways. New York State is only one of a handful of remaining US states without a safe passage law. [Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia](#) have passed defined safe passage laws. [Suffolk County](#) was the first county in New York to implement a minimum three-foot rule in 2021, and [Monroe County](#) has passed one as well. These bills are critical as fatalities and serious injuries to cyclists have skyrocketed in recent years. According to a 2015 analysis of bicycle crashes between 2008 and 2012 by the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety (IIHS), 9% of crashes and 45% of bicycle fatalities involved a vehicle hitting the bicyclist from behind or the side while traveling in the same direction.

The DMV Pre-Licensing Course bill also seeks to address the dangers posed to those most in danger on our roadways by better educating prospective licensees on how to safely interact with pedestrians, how to pass a bicyclist on the road, the use of bicycle lanes, and the danger that operating large multi-ton vehicles poses to bicyclists, pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. The Pre-Licensing Course bill aims to “create a thoughtful road culture” and encourage mutual respect among all types of road users, starting with robust street safety education when a teenager gets their permit.

Crash victims and their families have unacceptable difficulty getting police reports, are denied the ability to attend and testify at DMV hearings, and struggle to obtain the support they need after a crash. The Crash Victim Bill of Rights will address this by providing rights for traffic crash victims in related legal proceedings similar to the federal Crime Victims’ Rights Act. The Crash Victim Bill of Rights also will require that the State produce a report for the Legislature to determine the adequacy of current compensation and services for crash victims to cover medical bills, physical rehabilitation, counseling expenses, burial and funeral costs, lost wages, and other costs and types of assistance.

Addressing our transportation crisis with this package of bills will also allow New York State to reduce carbon emissions and pollutants. Safer streets are critical for reducing carbon emissions from transportation, since increased biking and walking have the potential to create major reductions in carbon emissions — but people won’t bike and walk more if they don’t feel safe on our streets.

We urge the Legislature to pass the entire CVRSA package in this year’s budget to ensure adequate funding for the two Complete Streets bills as well as the study on the adequacy of current compensation and services for crash victims.

In addition, on behalf of everyone in Families for Safe Streets, we hope the Legislature will give New York City and all localities permission to use automated enforcement to ensure drivers follow the speed limit and address other dangerous driving behaviors.

The speed camera program has proven to be incredibly effective and needs to be renewed and strengthened. The installation of speed safety cameras led to a [55%](#) drop in all traffic fatalities and a [72%](#) decline in speeding at safety camera locations citywide. In 2020, [more than half](#) of drivers who received one speed safety camera violation never received a second, even as the number of cameras (and therefore the odds of any speeding driver being ticketed) increased.

New Yorkers are overwhelmingly calling out for this life-saving tool. According to recent [polling by Siena College](#), 78% of New York City voters support speed safety cameras in school zones, including majorities of all age groups, races, and income levels, and in every borough. Even 73% of households that own cars support speed safety cameras. Support has only grown in the years since the program was introduced — including 93% of Latino voters and 75% of Black voters, up from 88 and 67% support, respectively, in 2016.

New Yorkers prefer speed safety cameras to armed police traffic enforcement: Three in five New York City voters, including 74% of Latino voters, 65% of Black voters, and 66% of voters in households making under \$50K per year, support relying on speed safety cameras and red light cameras for traffic enforcement rather than armed police officers.

We are counting on the Legislature to allow New York City to continue the speed camera program and lift the restrictions on when cameras can operate. Currently, this proven, popular life-saving tool is not allowed to operate half the time, including the most deadly hours in the evening and on weekends. Moreover, the program affords the opportunity to re-invest in communities most harmed by traffic violence and historically neglected.

We have a crisis on our roadways that requires bold action. US DOT Secretary Buttigieg recently acknowledged that traffic crashes are preventable and that “the status quo is unacceptable.” The [National Road Safety Strategy](#)’s Safe System approach focuses on lower speed limits, automated enforcement, managing speed with complete street designs, protecting our most vulnerable road users because doing so will ensure everyone is safe, and improving post-crash care to those personally impacted.

The US DOT urges states and localities to partner with them in ending this crisis and heed their cry for action. On behalf of everyone who knows the price of inaction, we are counting on you to rise to this challenge and help us end this senseless carnage on our streets.

Thank you.



**SAMMY COHEN ECKSTEIN**  
**(12/8/00-10/8/13)**

