



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

February 14, 2024

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland General Assembly
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher:

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, supports enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 464. This legislation will improve safety by permitting the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) to decrease speed limits by five miles per hour (mph) on urban state highways without an engineering or traffic investigation. SB 464 is critical and timely.

Speed is a major contributor to crashes in Maryland. In 2021, of the 561 traffic fatalities in the state, 30 percent (168) were speeding related.ⁱ Moreover, urban areas in Maryland are particularly at risk as 91 percent of the state's traffic fatalities occurred in urban areas.ⁱⁱ In addition to being tragic, the unnecessary deaths resulting from speeding are costly. Maryland incurred \$5.9 billion in economic harm, which is equivalent to \$956 per resident, due to motor vehicle crashes according to a 2019 analysis.ⁱⁱⁱ

Vulnerable road users (VRU) are particularly impacted by small changes in speed. The average risk of death for a pedestrian is 10 percent at an impact speed of 23 mph, 25 percent at 32 mph, and 50 percent at 42 mph.^{iv} Lowering speed limits will 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.^v Similarly, on high-capacity urban roads that are not expressways, Seattle experienced a 20 percent decline in crashes resulting in a police-reported injury.^{vi}

The efficacy of lower speeds is also demonstrated by outcomes of converse scenarios when speed limits are increased. A study found that from 1993-2017, a five-mph increase in state speed limits led to 37,000 more traffic deaths.^{vii}

Advancing this legislation will increase safety and decrease crash risk while curbing related costs in Maryland. We urge you to advance SB 464.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

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- i State Traffic Safety Information for Maryland (2021), NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/stsi.htm>.
- ii *Ibid.*
- 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 Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Sep. 2011., available at <https://aaaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2011PedestrianRiskVsSpeedReport.pdf>.
- v Effects of Lowering Speed Limits On Crash Severity in Seattle, Mar. 2023, IIHS, available at <https://www.iihs.org/api/datastoredocument/bibliography/2279>.
- vi *Ibid.*
- vii 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/datastoredocument/bibliography/2188>.