

ELIZABETH HOCKER, FAMILIES FOR SAFE STREETS
Testimony on Aggressive Driving
(for the Senate Majority Policy Committee, 4/7/26)

Good morning. My name is Elizabeth Hocker.

I am a mother and a member of Families for Safe Streets Greater Philadelphia.

Families for Safe Streets is a national organization with local chapters across the country made up of people who have been injured in a traffic crash or, like me, who have lost a loved one in a crash. We advocate for street design and policies that protect all road users .

I am grateful for Chairman Argall, Vice Chair Picozzi and the members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee for recognizing the need to hold a hearing on aggressive driving. We have an epidemic in Pennsylvania caused by policies and roadway design that invites aggressive driving. In 2024 alone, 1,127 people were killed in traffic crashes in Pennsylvania. My son was one of those 1,127 lives lost.

The pain of living without him is relentless, and it has affected not just our family, but his classmates and our larger community. All of our lives are profoundly altered.

My son, Damien, was only 17 years old when he was violently killed in a hit-and-run while walking home from the gym on April 16, 2024. He had always been a cautious child, and he was taking what we had determined to be the safest route home. Damien was less than three blocks from his father's house when he was struck while crossing the street.

Damien was my only child. We were extremely close, sharing a similar sense of humor and overlapping interests. He was an only grandchild who eagerly helped his grandparents when there was an opportunity. Damien was a leader amongst his friends and encouraged them to pursue their interests and take good care of themselves. He worked at a fast food restaurant and spent as much time as he could with his girlfriend. Damien aspired to be a personal trainer, having found exercise to be a great outlet for the stress and pressure of teenage life.

Road design isn't something most people think about every day. I know I didn't. Only after losing Damien did I learn that if a person walking is hit by a driver traveling at 45 miles per hour the risk of death is greater than 50%. But if that driver is traveling 25 mph, the risk of death goes down to close to 10%.

In recent years, there has been an increase in aggressive driving throughout our country including running red lights and speeding. Nationally, over 11,000 people are killed annually by speeding drivers. In Philadelphia, there are over 110 traffic fatalities every year. These tragedies are not inevitable.

There are well-proven, accessible solutions that, when layered in a Safe Systems Approach will prevent or reduce the severity of these crashes. There are cities around the world, and here in the US, where crashes have been eliminated entirely.

The Pennsylvania Traffic Calming Handbook offers a comprehensive list of improvements that can be made to our roads to discourage speeding. They are in the handbook because we know they work. We must install as many of these improvements as possible before more lives are lost. As a parent, it is a cold comfort when improvements are made after your child has been taken from you.

We desperately need to expand the installation of speed cameras and red light cameras throughout the City of Philadelphia and across all of Pennsylvania. Speed-related crashes are the leading cause of death for people walking in Philadelphia. Automated enforcement is highly effective; it is consistent and has no bias. It holds people accountable for their actions and deters them from continuing to break the law, and risk the lives of innocent people.

In addition to being an effective deterrent, automated enforcement can provide data on the worst speeders on our roads. In NYC, a study has shown that drivers with 20 automated speeding tickets are five times as likely to be involved in a deadly crash.

Across the country, states are passing legislation that would require the worst speeders on our roads to install Intelligent Speed Assistance technology in their cars. These devices use GPS to determine the speed limit and to control the accelerator, preventing a driver from excessive speeding, while still allowing them to get to work or school pickup. They can lead their lives - just without killing or harming anyone.

Pennsylvania State Representative Dougherty released a co-sponsorship memo about establishing a speed inhibitor program in September 2025. Expanded automated enforcement would allow us to know which drivers are not being deterred by tickets alone and may need further intervention. Data shows that the traditional approach of suspending drivers licenses is ineffective with 75% of people continuing to drive despite the suspension.

Walking is a basic freedom - one that enables greater access to our communities. All people should be able to safely walk in their neighborhoods, but my son never made it home. Walking here does not feel safe to me anymore.

We all want our children to be safe when walking to and from school, their friends' houses, and sports games. We all want to cross the street to the supermarket or bike to work without fearing for our lives. Traffic crashes do not care what political party someone belongs to. These tragic losses impact all of our families and ultimately tear the fabric of our communities.

Unfortunately, it falls on those who are grieving, often mothers like me who have lost a child to a crash to advocate for the proven changes that will keep people safe on our roads.

But we should all be demanding these changes. The solutions are before us. It is a matter of will.