Transportation Committee, January 27, 2021

Testimony of Debra St. Germain, AARP Connecticut Volunteer


Representative Lemar, Senator Cassano, Representative Simms, Representative Carney, Senator Somers, and Members of the Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB 5429. I am a Hartford resident, AARP volunteer, Vice Chair of the Hartford Commission on Disability Issues, and lifelong walker who wants safer streets for myself, my grandchildren, and all members of my community. I advocate on behalf of policies that help older adults live safely in their communities as they age, and this includes policies that improve pedestrian safety. I would like to offer my support for HB 5429.

As the number of older Connecticut residents continues to increase, it is more important than ever for policymakers to consider our unique needs when it comes to safety. According to Smart Growth America's 2019 “Dangerous by Design” report, “people age 50 and up, and especially people age 75 and older, are overrepresented in deaths involving people walking. This age group is more likely to experience challenges seeing, hearing, or moving, and if these trends are any indication, we are not devoting nearly enough attention to the unique needs of older adults when we design our streets.”

The report also notes that “compared to younger people who are struck and killed by drivers while walking, older adults killed while walking are more often at an intersection or within a crosswalk.” HB 5429 includes two provisions that specifically address crosswalks and have potential to reduce pedestrian fatalities:

- Section 1 would amend CGS §14-300 to require that vehicles grant right-of-way to pedestrians who are standing at the curb and indicate their intent to cross the roadway. This change would be very helpful not only to older adults, but to individuals who use wheelchairs, canes, crutches, walkers, or other mobility devices.

- Section 6 amends CGS §14-251 to clarify that vehicles cannot park within 25 feet of a marked crosswalk regardless of whether that crosswalk is located at an intersection or in the middle of a block. Parked cars can make it difficult for pedestrians to see oncoming traffic, and this change would make it safer for pedestrians to use mid-block crosswalks.

HB 5429 would also improve safety for drivers, pedestrians, and bikers of all ages by giving local traffic authorities more control over the speed limits on roads within their jurisdiction. Section 7 would make it easier for municipalities to change speed limits on roads located wholly within their jurisdiction, and Section 8 would allow municipalities to create pedestrian safety zones in areas with high levels of pedestrian activity.
Controlling speed is critical in preventing pedestrian fatalities, especially for older individuals. Because our bodies are less able to withstand physical trauma as they age, even slight changes in speed can mean the difference between life and death in a crash. For example: a 70 year old pedestrian hit by a car travelling at 35 miles per hour has about a 50% chance of being killed. Meanwhile, a 30 year old pedestrian has the same odds of survival when hit at 45 miles per hours (“Unsafe at Many Speeds,” ProPublica, 2016).

Speeding vehicles can also deter walking, bicycling, and other alternatives to driving. As a result, the overall livability of a neighborhood is compromised. Making it easier for local entities to control local speed limits is a sensible way to allow communities to respond to concerns about safety and livability.

As an older adult who has been an avid walker her entire adult life, I would strongly recommend that you amend Section 2 of the bill to specifically include older and disabled adults in the Vision Zero Council. Too often, the voices of older and disabled individuals are left out of policy conversations, and we bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table that could lead to better outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity share my support for HB 5429.