

**Testimony of Meredith Tomason,
on behalf of DC Families for Safe Streets
for the Committee on the Transportation & the Environment
public hearing on related traffic safety bills
Thursday, October 24, 2019**

My name is Meredith Tomason and I'm a founding member of the newly formed DC chapter of Families for Safe Streets. We are a group of survivors of traffic violence and families who lost loved ones who were killed or severely injured on our streets. We bear witness to our pain and suffering and envision a city where no loss of life in traffic is acceptable. We advocate for life-saving changes so that no other families suffer the grief and trauma that has impacted our families, like my family when my mother was fatally struck on October 12th, 2018. I have now lived 377 days without her. I am a founding member of this organization, as a matter of necessity and an attempt to heal from the unimaginable shock, loss and pain that my family and I are going through. Every day I put one foot in front of the other, the best way I know how, in this new world. A world that has shifted and tilted into a new position, thanks to the loss of my mother.

I had no time to prepare for this loss. The stop watch for the start of our grief started with the moment of impact when her head hit the front of the pick-up truck that struck her and then hit the pavement, on that sunny October morning. Our daily phone calls are no more. Her holding my face when she kisses my cheek, our long embraces after an extended time away from each other. It is all gone, thanks to her being struck **while in the cross walk, with the right of way** on the corner of H and 15th streets Northwest.

My parents were in town to visit, and to babysit my nieces, while my sister and brother in law were going to enjoy a weekend away. My mother forgot a hair brush, she motioned to my father that she would be right back, she left the hotel they were staying in and never came back. We do know she made it to CVS, since the hairbrush and a half eaten bagel were part of the items recovered at the scene and given to us at the hospital. Along with her purse, her scuffed shoes, and sunglasses splattered with coffee that must have splashed in her face during the moment of impact.

My father walked out of the hotel to a crime scene that he would soon learn was the place where his wife of 47 years was struck. The place where she was last herself. We were with her at GW hospital for the remainder of the day, but the injuries she sustained to her head were something we were told were not something she could recover from. Her brain would swell, her systems would fail, and she would die. She passed at 7:22pm that evening, less than 12 hours after being struck. Our lives are forever altered and I will never hear my mother's laughter again. The unexplainable and unimaginable happened to my mother and to our family. We live with this pain, frustration and loss every day. All of this could have been prevented and none of it should have happened. Not in our city. Not on your watch.

To give you an idea of the size and scale of the traffic violence epidemic in DC:¹

- Chairperson Cheh: Since you took office in 2007, 354 people have died on DC streets.
- Councilmembers Allen and Todd: Since you took office in 2015, 138 people have died on DC streets.
- Councilmember McDuffie: Since you took office in 2012, 196 people have died on DC streets.
- Councilmember Evans: Since you took office in 1991, 1,226 people have died on DC streets.

This is not acceptable.

Each of these people had family, friends, and loved ones—some of us are here today. And these numbers do not include the people who have been struck and have survived their crashes. We are part of an unfortunate club that we wish we are not a member of.

Traffic deaths and injuries are not inevitable—they are *preventable* crashes. Crashes are the result of a series of systems-level failures. For example, pedestrians and people traveling east of the river are disproportionately killed in our city. Of this year’s 21 fatalities, nearly half are people who were struck while walking. And nearly half occurred in Wards 7 and 8.² The District has failed to fix the systems-level failures to ensure that its residents and visitors are safe.

We ask this Committee to take accountability for the deaths and injuries that have occurred on our streets since you took office, and approve all of the legislation considered today that would make life-saving changes. Specifically, DC Families for Safe Streets supports the provisions to reduce the speed limit, redesign streets to prioritize safety; and strengthen driver education.

Research clearly tells us that speed kills. Someone who is struck by a vehicle traveling at 20 mph has a 90% chance of *surviving*. However, someone who is struck by a vehicle traveling at 40 mph has a 90% chance of *dying*. Reducing the speed limit, as proposed in the Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Amendment Act, will save lives.

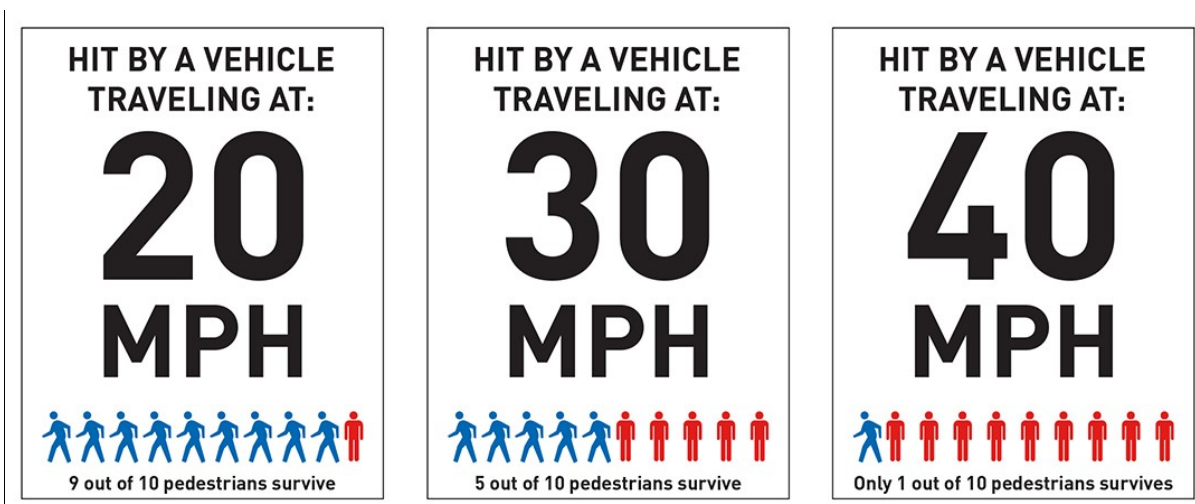


Image: Seattle Department of Transportation

However, we believe that along with lowering speeds, the Council must empower DDOT to routinely implement street redesigns that prioritize safety by deterring drivers from speeding. Simply lowering speed limits would not have saved Thomas and Jesus when they were struck by a person driving 68 mph on Pennsylvania Avenue NW. Or Dave when he was murdered by a person driving 78 mph on Florida Avenue NE. And this year alone, three people—Troy, Jascha, and an unidentified person—were all fatally struck while walking along a single corridor: North Capitol Street in Ward 5.

Improving the physical design of our streets, coupled with reduced speed limits, can fix the systematic failures of existing street designs and prevent cars from being driven recklessly like weapons on our city's streets. We therefore support the Curb Extensions Act, the Mandatory Protected Cycling Lane Amendment Act, and related items in the Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Amendment Act. We also encourage the Committee to go further and ensure that street redesigns prioritize safety for those disproportionately impacted: people who walk and communities in Ward 7 and 8.

Lastly, we strongly support strengthening driver education as written in the Omnibus Amendment Act to no longer waive the written exam. Drivers should be reminded through required education that driving is a privilege, not a right. It is common sense to require all drivers to learn our city's traffic laws, whether they just moved to DC or is a lifelong Washingtonian. We thank this Committee and the DC Council for taking up these bills. We urge you, as our elected officials, to end the physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma of traffic violence and to support safety for everyone who lives and visits the District.

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This testimony is submitted in remembrance of the 167 people who were killed in preventable crashes on DC streets since 2014, when Mayor Bowser included Vision Zero as a key pillar of her candidate platform:

2014: Travis Jackson (age 34 from Alexandria, VA). Unidentified person. Joseph Brown (age 61 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Edgar Garcia (age 50 from Odenton, MD). Brian Duncan (age 35 from Mount Rainier, MD). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Beverly Williams (age 58 from La Plata, MD). Queshawn Sexton (age 20 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Maurice Kirkland (age 24 from Northwest DC). Unidentified person. Nadia Seiler (age 36 from Wheaton, MD). Unidentified person. Edmond Crawford (age 23 from Oxon Hill, MD). Ltonya Brown (age 29 from Oxon Hill, MD). Unidentified person. Bareket Haile (age 26 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Tonya Reaves (age 53 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Steve Cymrot (age 72 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. **2015:** Unidentified person. Philip Snodgrass (age 27 from Baldwin, MD). Nancy Tinoza (age 26 from Arlington, VA). Jacqueline Barnes (age 28). Unidentified person. Faith Pines (age 68 from Fort Washington, MD). Peggy Dickie (age 79 from Northwest DC). Octavia Tillman (age 31 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. James Gary (age 73 from Northeast DC). George Mina (age 31 from Arlington, VA). Kwasi Gray (age 34 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Tomika Pardlow-Early (age 32 from Suitland, MD). Matthew Roth (age 24 from Arlington, VA). Ceneca Espinoza Sr. (age 37 from Southwest DC). Unidentified person. Emebet Kebede (age 56 from Lanham, MD). Unidentified person.

Reginald Burrell (age 64 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Janet Hoy (age 62 from Watertown, WI). Unidentified person. John Lindberg (age 62 from Northwest DC). Unidentified person. Christopher Brewer (age 30 from Southeast DC). **2016:** Ian Butts (age 36 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Gregory Hale (age 30 from Hyattsville, MD). Demetrus Keys (age 31 from Southwest DC). Unidentified person. Jerrel Elliott (age 23 from Southeast DC). Jeffery Scales (age 29 from Brandywine, MD). Vincent King (age 50 from Wheaton, MD). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Ever Fuentes (age 36 from Brentwood, MD). Debra Finley (age 57 from Bowie, MD). James Greene (age 50 from Catlett, VA). Armin Amin-Toomaji (age 44 from Potomac, MD). David Narvaez (age 29 from Arlington, VA). Michael Black (age 34 from Hyattsville, MD). Marquette Washington (age 22 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Vincent Lucas (age 21 from Southwest DC). Harry Perkins (age 41 from Hyattsville, MD). Jonathan Ramos Ayala (age 23 from Northwest DC). Tyre Bailey (age 19 from Suitland, MD). Alonzo Johnson (age 62). Kim Moore (age 50 from Bladensburg, MD). Dwayne Flythe (age 57 from Accokeek, MD). Kenneth Morris Jr (age 31 from Southeast DC). Jacqueline Cole (age 54 from Northwest DC). **2017:** Michael Waters (age 34 from Southeast DC). Tyrone Waters (age 23 from Southeast DC). Winnell Baker (age 35 from Landover Hill, MD). Antonio Holroyd (age 33 from Northwest DC). Unidentified person. Carolyn Ellis (age 65 from Clinton, MD). Jane Bennett Clark (age 65 from Takoma Park, MD). Lionel Bruce (age 58 from Northeast DC). Clinton Norman (age 33 from Northwest DC). Dan Neidhardt (age 74 from Northeast DC). Rhondye Williams (age 48 from Silver Spring, MD). Xavier Luckey (age 6 from Southeast DC). Patrick Kincaid (age 33 from Northwest DC). Raheem Johnson (age 28 from Northeast DC). Deandre Hamlin (age 27 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Nicholas Addams (age 82 from Northwest DC). Dalane Scales. Burgess Johnson (age 53 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Demetrius Mitchell (age 23 from Northwest DC). Cassidy Karakorn (age 39 from Northeast DC). Talata Williams (age 43 from Southeast DC). Jewel Lewis Hall (age 62 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Robert Quinn (age 47 from Leicester, England). Anderson Flores-Flores (age 23 from Northwest DC). Hassan Naseef (age 67 from Southwest DC). Samanta Iqbal (age 23 from Northeast DC). **2018:** Marcelina Yanez (age 84 from Manassas, VA). Margaret Johnson (age 69 from Oxon Hill, MD). Roderick Scott (age 60 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Emanuel Sweeney Jr. (age 56 from Clinton, MD). Vincent Childs (age 42 from Southeast DC). Deangelo Green (age 32 from Northeast DC). Hunter Brown (age 14 from Wilkesboro, NC). Unidentified person. Kenneth Clarke (age 19 from Bothell, WA). John Pelham (age 59 from Northwest DC). Jeffrey Price (age 22 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Anthony Johnson (age 33 from Northeast DC). Oren Dorell (age 53 from Northeast DC). Malik Habib (age 19 from Northeast DC). Dominique Lewis (age 15 from Southeast DC). Jarrod Bishop (age 30 from Northeast DC). Ronald May Jr. (age 40 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Jeffrey Long (age 36 from Northwest DC). Jonathan Sadler (age 25 from Northwest DC). Sherron Pressley (age 51 from Northeast DC). Johnson Doerue (age 67 from Northwest DC). Keisha Whitaker (age 37 from Southeast DC). Carlos Sanchez-Martin (age 20 from Silver Spring, MD). Thomas Hollowell (age 64 from Arlington, VA). Ramona Williamson (age 49 from Southeast DC). Carol Tomason (age 70 from Chapel Hill, NC). Marcellus Rooths (age 28 from Northeast DC). Kevin Thomas (age 32 from Temple Hills, MD). Kyree Payne (age 21 from Northeast DC). Sara Campbell (age 67 from Northeast DC). Cora Adams (age 85 from Elbe, WA). Monica Adams Carlson. **2019:** Troy Austin (age 56 from Southeast DC). Unidentified person. Willie Williams (age 65 from Northeast DC). Audrey Wimbish (age 53 from Southeast

DC). Lance Way (age 36 from Silver Spring, MD). David Salovesh (age 54 from Northeast DC). Unidentified person. Abdul Seck (age 31 from Bronx, NY). Joshua Williams (age 24 from Southeast DC). Latoya Anderson (age 34 from Southeast DC). Molly Waters (age 37 from Alexandria, VA). Unidentified pedestrian. Thomas Spriggs (age 42). Jesus Llanes-Datil (age 63). Nelson Orellana (age 39 from Northwest DC). Jascha Wilson (age 29 from Southeast DC). Jawan Evans (age 19 from Southeast DC). Romain Picou (age 28 from Highland, MD). Unidentified person. Unidentified person. Jerome Clark Jr (age 17 from Northeast DC).

¹ The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) for data through 2017 (<https://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/States/StatesFatalitiesFatalityRates.aspx>); and Metropolitan Police Department for data from 2018 through Oct 23, 2019 (<https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/traffic-fatalities>).

² Data compiled from traffic fatality press releases from Metropolitan Police Department through Oct 23, 2019 (<https://mpdc.dc.gov/newsroom>).