

Testimony on House Bills 4423 to 4427 for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee September 29, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I cannot attend the hearing but wish to have this statement read into the record. My name is Thad Peterson, and I retired from the Department of State Police in early 2013, after 25 years of service to the citizens of Michigan.

During the last 10 years of my career with the State Police I served as the commanding officer of the Traffic Services Section, where one of our main focus areas together with the Department of Transportation, County Road Commissions, and elected officials of all levels, was to correct hundreds of artificially low speed limits across the state.

The speed limit corrections during my tenure in traffic services (mostly increases of up to 15 miles per hour) impacted millions of vehicle miles traveled per day. Over that same time frame, Michigan's traffic fatality numbers plummeted, by about a third. In conjunction with my counterparts, I was recognized for those efforts with two Governor's Traffic Safety Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Traffic Safety.

Unfortunately, despite the tireless efforts of my staff and colleagues, we only scratched the surface of the speed limit corrections that are necessary to rebound from the damage done by the National Maximum Speed Limit campaigns of 1973 and '74, much less to bring about the broad-scope changes needed to account for the massive improvements in vehicle and roadway design in the 40 years since.

The only measure that can be truly effective in that regard is a bill package like the one before you that comprehensively locks speed limits together with science, and cuts the legs out from under the irrational fear-mongering designed to keep speed limits artificially low in the interest of money, not safety.

I support and applaud the bill sponsors for bringing forth this bill package, because simply put, it will legalize normal, safe driving behavior. In so doing, traffic safety will be maximized on Michigan's roadways for all road users, both motorized and non-motorized. At the same time, the pleasant driving environment of Michigan's roadways will be enhanced, bringing with it the undeniable benefit of improving the public's perceived value of Michigan's law enforcement members. After all, no one likes being pulled over and ticketed for driving at a speed they safely drive on a given road day in and day out.

In the interest of time and avoiding redundancy, I want to be brief, especially since I know you will likely hear more details from Mr. Jim Walker, one of the most knowledgeable people I have ever met in the area of speed limit establishment. So I will limit my substantive comments to two of the normal areas of concern when a speed limit increase is at hand:

People worry that vehicles/drivers will increase travel speeds by the amount of the speed limit increase. The best research solidly refutes this assertion, and I can personally tell you this – Of the hundreds of the road segments where we increased the speed limit up to the closest multiple of five miles per hour to the 85th percentile speed (again, many of these increases were 15 miles per hour), traffic travel speeds never increased significantly. To the contrary, more often than not the travel speeds of traffic stayed relatively constant, and some 85th percentile speeds actually DECREASED after significant increases in the speed limit. Travel speeds are made more CONSISTENT across the board, which is why crashes are normally reduced, and the crashes that do occur, do NOT tend to involve higher speeds than they did prior to the speed limit increase. The result is INCREASED SAFETY.

Road authorities are often concerned about something called "Design Speed." Interestingly, when citing this concern, they miss the point that if the speed limit is far below normal travel speeds for that segment of the roadway, they have already failed to design for the prevailing speeds at which traffic is already traveling

SAFELY. Speed limit corrections open the door for posting ADVISORY signs where road conditions warrant them, while increasing compliance with the speed limit. Artificially low speed limits, on the other hand, DON'T allow for the advisory signs that drivers in some cases really need!

Please accept these bills as written to improve traffic safety statewide.

Respectfully submitted, Thad V. Peterson, F/LI, Retired, Michigan Department of State Police