

# **Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT**

**Bill No.:** HB-7060

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSPORTATION WORKER SAFETY.

**Vote Date:** 3/19/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/26/2025

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Transportation Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill will designate the Andre DiDomenico Memorial Highway and State Trooper First Class Aaron Pelletier Memorial Bridge, require the attendance and completion of highway work zone and roadside vehicle safety awareness programs when obtaining a driver's license and violators of laws. It makes driving a motor vehicle on a limited access highway while engaged in any activity prohibited by the state's existing distracted driving law a reckless driving violation and increases the fines for violations of these laws, including if the worker is either injured or killed. This bill aims to memorialize and commemorate the lives and service of these two individuals while putting forth a commitment that violations of safety laws on the road will not be tolerated and takes several provisions to ensure that these tragedies will be less common and eventually will never occur again.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language removes language requiring the installation of six-inch wide edge lines on limited access highways. This language was removed as mandating the six-inch wide edge may create problems as every road differs in size and may not be able to fit it.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation**

Commissioner Eucalitto supports the bill, specifically sections 1-9. He notes and acknowledges the service and sacrifice of Trooper Aaron Pelletier and DOT employee Andrew DiDomenico and emphasizes the important protecting workers and emergency

responders. He highlights Sections 1 & 2 as a way to provide lasting recognition to the dedication that Pelletier and DiDomenico provided to their communities. Section 3-6 are described by him as a way to ensure that CT drivers understand the importance of driving safely in work zones and alongside emergency vehicles and described it as a proactive model that was implemented in Oklahoma last year. Sections 6 & 7 serve, as he says, as an important reminder that using technology while driving is unacceptable, and that more than half of fatal crashes in the state, in 2022, were of the type that are typically caused by distracted driving and has continued in an increasing trend. Additionally, nearly one hundred DOT vehicles were struck and in a dozen of those cases the operator of the vehicle required hospital care. Sections 8 & 9, he says, is a clear indication that violations of the "Slow Down, Move Over" law are serious is that it will have a noticeable impact on the violator and that the state takes the reasonability on protecting these workers seriously. The CTDOT is opposed to Section 10, which mandates six-inch wide paint stripes for added visibility, as it restricts their flexibility in implementing the most effective safety measures.

### **Tony Guerrero, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles**

Commissioner Guerrero supports the bill, noting that under current law operators convicted of speeding over 75 mph in a highway work zone or commercial driver exceeding 65 mph must complete an "Operator Re-Training Program" that features a responsible driving course. The DMV processes violations from the court, notifies individuals of the re-training requirement, and monitors course completion. Private vendors approved by the DMV offer the courses as well. Failure to complete the course on time results in suspension of driving privileges, as does a subsequent violation within 36 months. The DMV has discussed the initiative with the DOT, including the potential use of federal funds, and acknowledges the need for planning, course development, and system upgrades.

### **Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection**

Commissioner Higgins supports the bill, specifically the section related to naming a bridge after State Trooper First Class Aaron Pelletier. The Commissioner says that this highlights his contributions and service and the fact that memorials like this remind people of the dedication and risk law enforcement face every day and ensures that Pelletier's legacy continues and can serve as a source of pride for his colleagues, family and the public.

### **Manisha Juthani, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Public Health**

Commissioner Juthani supports the bill, highlighting that two of their state employees were killed in CT highways, and transportation-related deaths on the job doubled in 2023 from 2021. The Commissioner emphasizes that the bill is committed to make the roads safer and the overall responsibility we must promote safe work environments including transit workers.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Shari DiDomenico**

Ms. DiDomenico, the mother of the late Andrew DiDomenico, provided testimony in support of the bill. She shared the tragic day of losing her son and the immediate impact this had on

her family and his co-workers, emphasizing that Andrew loved his job and should not have lost his life and that there should be policy changes to prevent more work zone tragedies. She is supportive of the required work zone and roadside safety training course, saying it could increase compliance with the laws and save lives. She also supports the increase in penalties for offenses, singling the importance of these crimes. Lastly, she supports designating a portion of the highway in honor of Andrew and a bridge in honor of State Trooper First Class Aaron. M. Pelletier, as it is a proper recognition of their service and a reminder to slow down and move over for work zones.

**Carl Chisem, President, CT Employees Union Independent**

Mr. Chisem supports the bill, highlighting the hard work his union does and the personal risk they put themselves in every single day to repair, plow, and maintain Connecticut's state roads and bridges. The work that they do is dangerous, he says, and personal experiences (like that of Andrew DiDomenico) only add to the data that shows more workers are being killed on CT's roads on the job. With the increase in impaired and distracted drivers on the roads, he states it is important for this bill to pass to implement safety improvement for both workers and travelers.

**Travis Woodward, President, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001**

Mr. Woodward supports the bill, noting that it is crucial to improving safety on Connecticut's roads for DOT workers, who regularly experience cars flying past them as they try to do their jobs. The provisions in this bill, especially honor Andrew DiDomenico, are important gestures that need to be made to recognize his sacrifice and make sure this tragedy never happens again. He emphasizes that everyone who works alongside the state's highway wants to stay safe and return home safe.

**Carmen Bazzano, Transportation Maintainer, CTDOT, and Ryan Martel, Qualified Craft Worker, CTDOT**

Mr. Bazzano and Martel support the bill, highlighting the dangerous work that they and their co-workers do every day and the need for legislative protections to protect them and their families.

**Peter Brown, President, Uniformed Professional Fire fighters Association (UPFFA)**

Mr. Brown supports the bill, noting the fact that firefighters (who respond to thousands of motor vehicle incidents that cause 300 fatalities yearly) face significant dangers while responding to patients, rescues and hazards on limited-access highways, with high-speed traffic and confined spaces increasing risk. These hazards become more dangerous when considering time, weather, and reckless or impaired driving. Rising traffic and distracted driving are on the rise and with that comes more accidents. He supports the bill because it aims to reduce these risks and protect emergency responder and highway workers.

**Joshua Caskey**

Mr. Caskey supports the bill, noting that he sees reckless driving around narrow work zones in East Lyme. He advocates for additional measures to ensure enforcement of traffic laws, noting the increase in reasonable driving when photo enforcement was imposed.

**Carolina Cavalcante, Jersalen Graterol, and Marcus Stevenson**

The above individuals support the bill, emphasizing the importance of the safety of their workers and the significant risks they face daily. They note that workers, when they feel safe, can focus on their tasks without the fear of accidents, leading to better productivity and better outcomes for the projects they work on. They believe that enhancing safety protocols helps everyone who travels on CT roads and makes the roads safer for everyone.

**Senator Paul Cicarella, Connecticut General Assembly**

Senator Cicarella supports the bill, noting the meaningful tribute to the service of DOT Employee Andrew DiDomenico and State Police officer Aaron Pelletier. He supports the roadside vehicle safety awareness program which is vital for education drivers on safety in vulnerable areas and amending the distracted driving laws to classify them as reckless driving as it reinforces the problem's severity; increasing penalties for violating the law, he notes, is essential to protect workers. Requiring six-inch wide edge lines on highways will improve lane visibility and reduce accidents. The bill, he adds, would take a comprehensive approach to roadway safety while honoring our heroes.

**Christopher Fortier**

Mr. Fortier supports the bill but believes the proposal to name the overpasses should be rejected, as he believes doing it is meaningless since the names aren't used in daily life and don't truly honor the individuals and that putting up these signs could put DOT workers at risk. He says that memorials, parks, and local structures are more meaningful. He wants this provision to be eliminated as well as a moratorium placed on the whole practice of naming overpasses after individuals.

**Sandra Fry, Chair, CT Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board**

Ms. Fry supports the bill, but requests that the legislature consider increasing fines for those who kill or injure vulnerable users (as defined in SGC 14-300i) along with roadway workers and emergency vehicle operators and/or occupants. She also requests that the driver safety education course provide information on operating around emergency vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

**Representative Irene Haines, Connecticut General Assembly**

Representative Haines supports the bill, but requests the language be changed to include stiffer penalties and amending the statute that licenses can be suspended without hearing in order to reduce repeat offenders of reckless driving as well as "super speeders." Specifically:

- Section 6, Section 14-222c starting at line 272
  - amend the violating speed threshold to 86 mph up to 99 mph, and that they be fined no less than \$500 and be assessed two points against the license.

- include that those who operate a motor vehicle above 99 mph shall not be fined less than \$1,000 and are assessed four points against the person's license.
- Allow the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to suspend the license or privilege to operate a motor vehicle for a period of thirty days.
- Subsection (b) of section 14-111
  - Require the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to suspend, without hearing a person's license or privilege to operator a motor vehicle for violating 14-222 for 90 days.
  - Require the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to suspend, without hearing a person's license or privilege to operate a motor vehicle for a violation of section 14-219 and 14-222 within a ten-year period for a period of not less than six months or more than once year.

**Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO**

Mr. Hawthorne supports the bill, emphasizing the fact that the DOT risk their lives daily to ensure safe roads and acknowledging the tragedy of Aaron Pelletier and Andrew DiDomenico. While increasing fines for speeding in work zones and implementing a speed safety camera pilot program have been important steps in the right direction, he writes that more needs to be done. Transportation deaths made up a significant portion of work-related fatalities in CT, and injuries to highway workers continue to rise. He praises the comprehensive work zone awareness program as it would teach safe driving practices, the dangers of work zones and personal stories from highway workers and families and improve driver awareness and behavior to ensure the safety of road workers.

**Don Shubert, Executive Director, Connecticut Construction Industries Association, Inc.**

Mr. Shubert supports the bill, highlighting the risks that highway workers face every day from distracted and speeding drivers as well as physical labor and heavy machinery. He calls the education program for new drivers and those convicted violating the "move over" law and increased penalties proactive approaches to protect workers and educate drivers before hitting the road.

**Alec Slatky, Managing Director of Public and Government Affairs, AAA Northeast**

Mr. Slatky supports the bill, specifically sections 3-5, which creates education efforts for new drivers and for those that violate the "move over law," protecting tow truck drivers, roadside workers, emergency responders and stranded motorists by aiming to reduce these fatalities. He emphasized the dangerous association with violating the laws by citing a study that found 120 tow truck drivers, 125 police officers, and 400 highway workers being struck from 2015-2021. Notes that AAA is studying the factor influencing compliance with the laws.

**Representative Donna Veach, Connecticut General Assembly**

Representative Veach supports the bill, saying it aligns with a bill she introduced and addressed the increasing dangers on the road. She notes that the current penalties are not effective and insufficient, and there is a growing need for stronger enforcement. The stricter

penalties, increased fines, and mandatory education for offense in the bill will help to deter reckless behavior and promote responsible driving.

**Brandon Wilson, Transportation Maintainer, CTDOT**

Mr. Wilson the bill, emphasizing how little regard drivers have for the safety and well-being of him, his fellow workers, and his family. He sees drivers passing them at speeds of 70+ MPH and very few drivers actually slow down. He would like more police presence to try to deter drivers and make them slow down. He highlights the dangerous work that he and his co-workers do every day and the need for legislative protections to protect them and their families.

**Benjamin Berman, Transportation Engineer Trainee, CTDOT**

Mr. Berman supports the bill, reflecting on the day Andrew DiDomenico was killed (which was his first day) and the tragedy of it all. He notes his personal experience of having cars going 20+ MPH over the speed limit while working and the fear he has every day of another preventable and tragic loss similar to Andrew. He believes that enacting meaningful change can honorably remember their service and sacrifice as the state tries to protect everyone who honorably works along the roads in CT from first responders to those who build and maintain the infrastructure.

Several family, friends, and community members that knew Andrew DiDomenico provided the same testimony in supports the bill, highlighting the events of June 28, 2024, the impact it has on his family, and supported the bill's common-sense provisions to protect and save the lives of workers on state highways. These include establishing a required work zone and roadside vehicle safety awareness program for CT driver's license applicants to participate in, make distracted driving on a limited access highways a reckless driving violation, increasing the penalties for endangering a highway worker and violating the "move over" law, and naming a portion of a highway in Meriden in honor of Andrew. This testimony was provided by:

- Greg Alwang
- Sean Barth
- Sheryl Bedard
- Jean Bernier
- Cindy Cannata
- Brittany Carr
- Diane Cassella
- Eric Cerasale
- Alyssa Chaikowski
- Several Concerned citizens
- Cathy Cluen
- Gary Cluen
- Jennifer Collingham
- Andrew Copely
- Richard Coppola
- Ellen Costello

- Lori D'Avanzo
- Denise Kennedy
- Nancy Dempsey
- Bruce Eldridge
- Denise Eldridge
- Deanell Fraser
- Patricia Gross
- Robin Gustafson
- Karen and Jim Haggett
- Judy Harris
- Somer Hettrick
- Amy Hoeing
- Lawrence Jardine
- Catherine Johnson
- Jeff Larson
- Matthew Larson
- Daniel and Diane Lebel
- Bianca Malorino
- Gennaro and Rebecca Martorelli
- Steven Massucci
- Joseph Miller
- Christine Morin
- Michael Nickerson
- John and Cheryl Penwell
- Lisa Quinn
- Cheryl Raffile
- Marcos Ramos
- Carley Rich
- John Rich
- Rich Varrato
- Cynthia Walker
- Allan Ward
- Susan White
- Christopher Whiting
- Amanda Whitton

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

No testimony in opposition to the bill was submitted.

**Reported by: Patrick Riley**

**Date: 3/27/2025**