

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1375

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHWAY, PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLIST SAFETY.

Vote Date: 3/19/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/26/2025

File No.:

Disclaimer: *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee
Department of Transportation

REASONS FOR BILL:

Section 1 increases the penalty for various crosswalk violations.

Section 2 prohibits driving in the extreme left lane on limited access highways with three or more lanes, with some exceptions.

Section 3 increases the age from 18 to 21 under which a motorcycle rider must wear a helmet.

Section 4 makes it illegal under the distracted driver law to play a video on a mobile electronic device that is within the view of the driver and expands the definition of "mobile electronic device" to include any installed screen or video monitor.

Section 5 prohibits consuming or possessing open alcoholic beverage containers in a vehicle's passenger area while driving on the highway and makes violations of the law infractions.

Section 6 increases the age under which wearing a helmet is required to ride a bike or similar vehicle from 16 to 18.

Section 7 requires the DOT to assign employees to support the adoption of Complete Streets standards or policies throughout the state. This includes administering grants and giving municipalities incentives to finalize projects incorporating the Complete Streets standards.

Section 8 Requires the Vision Zero Council and the Chief State's Attorney to study the feasibility of using intelligent speed assistance devices to address reckless driving in the state. These devices are defined as devices to be installed in a vehicle to actively monitor and limit the speed at which a vehicle is capable of traveling based on the speed limit of the vehicle's location.

Section 9 requires drivers convicted of reckless driving to take the operator's program upon their first conviction.

Section 10 exempts e-bikes used by a resident with a physical disability from the maximum MSRP for CHEAPR eligibility.

This bill aims to encourage safe vehicle operation practices around the state by increasing penalties for unsafe driving, adding new technology to the prohibited device list, and requires compliance with safety devices and helps the state meet national standards regarding open alcohol container law.

Substitute Language

The substitute language removes sections about retroreflective paint, reports of unsafe driving incidents, and a traffic study in New Britain. It modifies the intelligent speed devices study by removing the Judicial Branch, adding the Chief State's Attorney, and allowing the DOT to partner with a higher education institution or other research entity. It makes minor and technical revisions, including redrafting the distracted driving section and removing reference to personal mobility devices. This language change removes the provision on retroreflective paint as the committee felt it was an unnecessary mandate. It further removes the New Britain traffic study as the DOT determined that legislative action was not needed to address the project.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

William Tong, Connecticut Attorney General

Attorney General Tong supports the bill and cites that there were over 300 car crash related deaths on Connecticut roads last year. It is vital that we do anything we can to make our roads safer and that this bill is a step in the right direction. While this bill, along with HB7060, have provisions that expand the definition of reckless driving and new accountability measures for those convicted of reckless driving, he urges the Committee to go a step further and subject extreme reckless drivers, such as those that exceed one-hundred miles per hour, to temporary lose access to their vehicles.

Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation

Commissioner Eucalitto supports some sections of the bill and opposes others. The Department supports sections one thru five, and eleven. They oppose section seven regarding reflective paint, citing high costs and the young age of the technology. They oppose section nine because the department is opposed to statutory delineations of what staff must or must not work on, as it restricts the agency's ability to adapt to changing federal and technical needs over time. They support the intent of section ten but hope the Vision Zero Council would partner with a university or other national transportation research entity to study and recommend legislation, rather than do it all on their own. They oppose the traffic

study impacting traffic at Route 71 and Route 9 in New Britain because they deem it unnecessary, and it does not conform to current regulations or statutes.

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, External Affairs Division

The CT Judicial Branch, External Affairs Division, takes no position on the bill, but would like to raise a concern with Section 10. They state that Section 10 would require the Vision Zero Council, in consultation with the Judicial Branch, to study the feasibility of leveraging intelligent speed assistance to address the issue of speeding and reckless driving. However they note, the Judicial Branch has no role with the Vision Zero Council, and they feel it is not appropriate for the Branch to recommend whether intelligent speed assistance devices should be used, particularly whether they should be used in lieu of or in addition to the punishment for the various crimes to which the use of these devices might apply. The Judicial Branch respectfully requests that the phrase "in consultation with the Judicial Branch" be removed from line 426 of the bill.

Manisha Juthani, Commissioner, Connecticut Dept. of Public Health

Commissioner Juthani supports the bill in its' entirety, however, wishes to highlight support for section three thru six as they will have significant positive public health implications, especially the requirement for motorcyclists to wear helmets. She cited the statistic that from 2015 to 2023 57% of motorcycle fatalities were not wearing a helmet, and that DPH supports this bill as it has the potential to save hundreds of lives.

Nancy Navaretta, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Mental Health, and Addiction Services

DMHS is a health care agency whose mission is to promote the health and wellness of adults with behavioral needs through coordinated and comprehensive mental health and substance use prevention. The five regional behavioral health action organizations that they fund have been focusing on addressing adult alcoholic misuse. Commissioner Navaretta supports the concepts proposed in section five of the bill, regarding prohibiting open alcoholic beverage containers in motor vehicles as it is in line with the efforts being made by DMHS.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Robert Aloise, Director of Transportation, Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)

Director Aloise strongly supports the intent of the bill to improve roadway safety, specifically sections one thru eleven. However, they note it is unclear whether sections twelve or thirteen aim to improve roadway safety, as it appears they are designed to achieve other objectives.

Joshua Caskey

Mr. Caskey supports the bill because they support complete streets, reflective road paint, and want reports of unsafe driving taken seriously. They feel enforcement of road laws are also very important.

Jan DeAngelo

Ms. DeAngelo supports the bill, especially noting the benefits of reflective paint on roadways. They also support a retraining program for those convicted of reckless driving.

Sandra Fry, Chair, Connecticut Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Chairwoman Fry supports the bill because they say it will improve bicyclist and pedestrian safety and furthers the complete streets interests of the state.

Anonymous Student, Ledyard High School

Supports the bill because in their community, they say motorists are driving too fast, and sidewalk improvements would help lower fatality rates.

Brendan Campbell, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Director of Pediatric Trauma

Kevin Borrup, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Executive Director of the Injury

They support the bill, specifically section three which would require helmets to be worn by all motorcycle operators up to age 21, citing data that not only do helmets reduce the risk of death, but noting that the human brain is not fully developed until one reaches their mid-20's, and younger motorists are therefore even more likely to make risky impulse decisions than older motorists.

Bob DeAngelo, Co-Chair, Transportation Task Force

Mr. DeAngelo supports the bill, citing present high congestion along I-95, and CT ranking low nationally in pedestrian safety. They also strongly support the Complete Streets model for planning safety at the beginning of all developments.

Katherine Jacobs

Ms. Jacobs supports the bill because they want to see reckless drivers penalized and retrained, strongly support the safety of pedestrians and cyclists, and appreciate investment into EV technology as a step towards combating climate change.

New Britain Legislative Delegation, Sen. Lopes (S6), Rep. Sanchez (24), Rep Sanchez (25), Rep. DeFronzo (26), and Rep. Turco (27)

They support the bill, citing significant traffic and congestion concerns regarding recent developments in the New Britain area. They ask for a moratorium on building permits for any developments in the area along the corner of Hartford Road and Village Square Drive, until a new traffic study is completed, and significant efforts are undertaken to alleviate the existing and potential future traffic flow problems.

Steven S. Mitchell, Advisor, Bike Walk Connecticut, Board Member and East Coast Greenway

Mr. Mitchell strongly supports section 6 (b) of the bill and encourages the committee to expand helmet requirements beyond roadways and parks to include all locations where children ride bicycles. They cite the still developing cognitive and motor skills of 15- to 17-year-old children as one of the many reasons this legislation is crucial.

Peter O'Connor

Supports the bill for broad unrelated reasons.

Richard Paukner, Legislative Chairman, Connecticut Motorcycle Riders Association Inc.

Mr. Paukner did not offer a position on the legislation but shared several statistics regarding injuries and fatalities motorcyclists incurred in the state over the past few decades.

Judy Proctor, Southport Resident

Ms. Proctor supports the bill, because they feel each provision will work to decrease unnecessary deaths from traffic violence in the state.

Abigail Roth, New Haven Resident

Ms. Roth supports the provision of the bill dedicated to adopting implementation of Complete Streets standards or policies.

Kate Rozen, Board Member, CHEAPR

Ms. Rozen supports the proposed revisions of section twelve of the bill regarding e-bikes, however urges the committee to consider additional wording that would establish a predictable annual funding cycle for e-bike rebates, apply income eligibility requirements consistently across e-bike and EV rebate programs, adjusting the voucher amount to reflect inflation and ensure accessibility for low income applicants, implementing text message notifications and ensuring monthly dashboard updates, allocating marketing fund to improve program outreach, and restoring the role of the CHEAPR Advisory Board to provide oversight and input.

Alec Slatky, Managing Director of Public and Government Affairs

Mr. Slatky supports sections three, four, five, ten and eleven on behalf of both AAA Northeast and AAA Club Alliance. They note that regarding section three, they'd prefer a helmet law that effects all riders, but appreciate that at least persons aged below 21 would now be required to wear a helmet. In regard to section four, they wish the bill would specifically add language to state that watching videos is prohibited.

Adam Weber

Mr. Weber supports the bill in general, however proposes that the distracted driving penalties be modified to include the same license suspension and revocation penalties as a DUI infraction.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU Connecticut

The ACLU supports some provisions of the bill, but specifically opposes sections one, two, four and eight on the grounds that the goal of the ACLU is to end mass incarceration, and that they see fines and fees in the criminal justice system as a price that traps people into cycles of debt that disproportionately harm persons of color and persons who are impoverished. Therefore, ACLU-CT opposes the bills proposal to increase fines and criminal penalties. However, they support the provisions of the bill that are not related to those measures and instead increase the physical safety of our roads, such as section seven.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Paul Audet, Co-Chairman, Connecticut Motorcycle Riders Association Inc. (CMRA)

Mr. Audet is opposed to the legislation because they are opposed to a universal helmet law, but they would be agreeable towards legislation bringing the age of adult requirement to under 21 years of age.

Ryder FitzGerald, Engineer (Retired)

Mr. FitzGerald opposes the legislation because they are opposed to mandating helmets for motorcyclists, saying helmets do not have a significant impact on reducing fatalities for

motorcyclists. They cited data from NY state and UConn, comparing NY state, which has stricter helmet laws to CT which they feel supports their position.

Glenn Richard

Mr. Richard opposes the bill because they feel proper motorcycle operation by the operator is the primary factor in motorcyclist safety, wearing a helmet is secondary.

Geoff Viscount, Milford Resident and Motorcyclist

Mr. Viscount opposes the legislation because he feels mandatory motorcyclist helmet legislation is unneeded, and motorcyclists should be allowed to make that decision for themselves.

Reported by: Alex Sferrazza

Date: 3/28/25