

March 10, 2009

Dear Transportation Committee:

I am submitting written testimony to whole-heartedly support the passage of Complete Streets legislation for the State of Connecticut. As a medical student at Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, I have been impacted greatly by the death of my fellow student, Mila Rainof, last April. Mila was crossing South Frontage Road at York Street, directly in front of Yale-New Haven Hospital. There was a truck pulling out of the loading dock into the intersection. Her walk cycle time ran out, so she started to run. A small black car, whose view was blocked by two SUVs in the adjacent lanes, accelerated as its signal turned green. Mila did not see the car that hit her as she approached the curb, and she landed on her head.

Like many, I was impacted by Mila's gigantic smile, warmth, and energy while she was living. She was about to graduate medical school and begin a career in emergency medicine. She would have had the opportunity to help countless people, and we are all worse off without her. I am sad for her family, friends, our Yale med community, her boyfriend who had to start his residency in California without her, and the many people who would have been healed by her warmth, intelligence and skill as her patients.

This bill is not only about Mila. Nor is it about 11-year-old Gabrielle Lee, who was killed by a car on Whalley Avenue only six weeks after Mila died. It is about all the people of New Haven and Connecticut whose lives will be made healthier, calmer, and safer with streets that reflect our values. As a medical student whose research focuses on childhood obesity, I am keenly aware of how unsafe streets contribute to sedentary lifestyles. Communities designed solely for cars make it much more difficult for people to walk and cycle for everyday transportation needs. Recent studies using objective measures of total physical activity have found that residents of high-walkable neighborhoods get one hour more of physical activity each week and are 2.4 times more likely to meet physical activity recommendations than residents of low-walkable neighborhoods.¹

During clinical encounters, I have heard many adolescents tell me that their parents force them to stay inside with their televisions, video games and snacks. While crime is a major reason for their parents' fears, children are actually more likely to be hurt by cars than by crime. Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death for all people ages 2 through 34. In addition, streets where there are more people walking and cycling might lead to a reduction in crime and a greater sense of security.

Since I have become involved in Elm City Cycling, the Yale Medical Campus Traffic Safety Group and the New Haven Safe Streets Coalition, I have had many discussions with members of the medical and public health community about the importance of designing streets that are safe for pedestrians and cyclists. The health benefits are clear:

¹ Sallis et al. "The role of built environments in physical activity, eating, and obesity in childhood." *The future of children*. 2006 vol:16 iss:1 pg:89-108.

reduction of traffic-related injuries and deaths, as well as improved fitness due to greater walkability and safer cycling. Passing Complete Streets Legislation for Connecticut is an important step to prevent needless deaths, and improve the health and quality of life of our population.

Sincerely,

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