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February 02, 2013

Testimony of Representative Minnie Gonzalez Transportation Committee

House Bill #5451, An Act Concerning The Maximum Speed Limit On State Highways, Reckless Driving And Fines For Speeding And Reckless Driving

Good afternoon Chairman Maynard, Chairman Guerrero and members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the committee this afternoon. I am Representative Minnie Gonzalez and I represent the 3rd Assembly District in Hartford. I am here today to testify in favor Proposed H.B. No. 5451, An Act Concerning The Maximum Speed Limit On State Highways, Reckless Driving And Fines For Speeding And Reckless Driving.

The majority of drivers today on our states highways travel at speeds that exceed speed limit. The numbers of drivers that travel faster than the speed limit are, in my opinion, overwhelming the state police's enforcement of speed limits. Increasing the speed limit and stricter enforcement of speeding above the increased limit will allow state police to more easily manage the speeding situation we have today on our state's highways.

The bill calls for strict enforcement and increased fines for drivers that travel above the increased speed limit. I believe the increased speed limit is approximately what the majority of drivers are traveling today.

Also, if the bill were to be adopted, we must ensure that we enforce penalties for drivers that speed into the reckless range. We must send the message that our state's highway speed limits must be adhered to for the safety of all.

I thank you once again and urge the committees support.



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

January 18, 2013

2013-R-0074

SPEED LIMIT INCREASES AND ACCIDENT RATES

For: Honorable Minnie González

By: Paul Frisman

You asked if raising speed limits results in an increase in the number or rate of motor vehicle accidents. Much of the information in this report is from a 2006 National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) report. NCHRP researches problems affecting highways.

SUMMARY

Numerous studies of the relationship between increased speed limits and accident rates have been conducted since 1987, when states were allowed to increase maximum speed limits from 55 miles per hour (mph) to 65 mph. According to the NCHRP, the studies did not identify a clear relationship.

Consequently, NCHRP conducted its own study to help guide state highway officials and policy makers in setting speed limits. It examined these earlier studies, surveyed state transportation and police departments, and collected and analyzed relevant data.

The NCHRP study found that higher speed limits were associated with an increased likelihood of deaths and incapacitating injuries. It found that increasing a speed limit from 55 to 65 mph on an "average" section of high speed road resulted in about a 3% increase in the total number of crashes and a 24% increase in the likelihood that a vehicle occupant would be fatally injured. This increased crash rate would yield a 28% increase in the number of fatalities following the speed limit increase.

The study also found a similar, but lesser, impact when speed limits were raised from 65 to 75 mph. In those cases, the total number of crashes increased by 0.64%, increasing the probability of a fatality by 12%, with an overall increase of 13% in total fatalities. Although the analysis did not explain why a smaller increase occurred at the higher speeds, the study suggested that people may drive more cautiously when driving faster, or that roads deemed appropriate for a 75 mph limit are safer.

A subsequent study published in the American Journal of Public Health found about a 3.2% increase in road fatalities attributable to the raised speed limit on all roads in the U.S. The highest increases were on rural and urban interstates. The researchers attributed 12,545 deaths and 36,583 injuries in fatal crashes over a 10-year period to increased speed limits nationwide.

CHANGES IN NATIONAL SPEED LIMIT LAWS

In 1974, a National Maximum Speed Limit (NMSL), designed chiefly to conserve fuel, took effect, establishing a national maximum speed limit of 55 mph.

Congress relaxed the law in 1987, allowing states to set speed limits of up to 65 mph on interstate roads in areas with fewer than 50,000 people ("rural interstates").

In 1995, Congress repealed the NMSL, allowing states to set their own speed limits (or none at all) on their roads. Most states have since increased the speed limits on some or all of their roads

STUDIES OF THE IMPACT OF INCREASED SPEED LIMITS ON ACCIDENT RATES

Study Conclusions

In the years following both changes in the law, researchers conducted numerous studies on the relationship between higher speed limits and accident rates. The studies' results varied, depending, in part, on the analytical methods used and limits on the type of data available. (Most of the studies looked only at accidents in which a fatality occurred, since only these must be reported to the federal Fatality Analysis Reporting System.)

For example, according to a 2005 presentation by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), five studies conducted on the effects of the 1987 law allowing states to raise speed limits to 65 mph on rural interstates variously found:

1. a 15% increase in fatalities on rural interstates,
2. a 22% increase in fatal crashes on rural interstates,
3. a 19% increase in fatalities on rural interstates relative to other roads,
4. no increase in fatality rates on rural interstates (and a 12% decrease in fatality rates on rural interstates where the 55 mph limit was retained), and
5. in states that raised speed limits to 65 mph, a 3% to 5% decrease in statewide fatality rates.

Similarly, three studies of the effects of the full repeal of NMSL in 1995 variously found a:

1. 15% increase in fatalities and 17% increase in fatality rates on interstates with increased speed limits;
2. 35% increase in fatalities in states with 70 mph speed limits and 38% increase in fatalities in states with 75 mph speed limits; and
3. 6% increase in fatalities and 15% increase in injuries on interstates, and 2% decrease in fatalities and 3% increase in injuries on non-interstates.

A fourth study found that raising speed limits insignificantly increased fatalities and significantly reduced injuries. We have attached the IIHS presentation.

NCHRP Study

A 2006 NCHRP study (http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rrd_303.pdf and http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/kockelman/public_html/NCHRPSpeedLimits17-23.pdf) took note of the disparity in findings. Based on the studies, it said, "it is clear that the more dire predictions made about the likely safety effects of the NMSL relaxation and repeal have not come to pass. Although some researchers have found significant changes in the