

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



### **Testimony of Steven Higashide, Senior Planner/Connecticut Coordinator Connecticut General Assembly, Transportation Committee Public Hearing March 5, 2014**

Good morning. My name is Steven Higashide and I am the senior planner and Connecticut coordinator for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a nonprofit transportation watchdog group that works in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey.

I am here today in strong support of **SB 336, "An Act Concerning the Penalty for Causing Harm to a Vulnerable User of a Public Way."** This bill has been endorsed by 23 organizations, some of whom are here today and all of whom are listed on the attached fact sheet. The bill defines vulnerable users of the state's public ways. These include pedestrians, highway workers, cyclists, a person driving or riding an animal, a person using a skateboard, roller skates, or inline skates; a person operating an agricultural tractor or farm implement, and a blind person and his or her service animal.

This legislation also creates a fine of up to \$1,000 for motorists convicted of inflicting serious physical injury or death to a vulnerable user. The bill does not absolve vulnerable users from using the road responsibly, but creates needed penalties for motorists who do not.

SB 336 is a much-needed step towards increased driver accountability. Careless drivers who injure or kill are often not held accountable except in cases of drug or alcohol use, or hit-and-run. We need to close this enforcement gap and remind everyone that motor vehicles must be operated with due care. In fact, Tri-State would also support language that was introduced in prior sessions, which would require persons committing an infraction under this law to attend driver retraining and perform community service.

I want to note the testimony of three Yale School of Medicine professors and practicing physicians who work in pediatric emergency medicine. Drs. Kirsten Bechtel, Antonio Riera, and Karen Santucci could not be here today, but they asked that I share their testimony with you and I've included all three in the packet.

The vulnerable user bill passed the State Senate unanimously last session, and the session before. We are not aware of any substantive objections to this bill. Since 2010, more than 130 pedestrians and cyclists have been killed on Connecticut's roadways, and thousands have been injured. We can't wait any longer.

I also want to note Tri-State's support for **SJ 23, "Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution Limiting the Use of Moneys Contained in the Special Transportation Fund."** This committee is well aware of the Special Transportation Fund's troubled history. Had over a billion dollars not been diverted from the transportation fund, it's possible that we could have avoided some of the problems now occurring on the New Haven Line, and could have fixed some of the more than 400 bridges which remain structurally deficient. This is a chance to lock the lockbox once and for all. Thank you.