

**Testimony of the D.C. Pedestrian Advisory Council**  
**October 4, 2023**  
**Committee on Transportation and the Environment**  
**and Committee on Public Works and Operations**

The Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) was created by DC law in 2009 to advise "the Mayor, Council...and District agencies" on how to improve "pedestrian safety and accessibility." In recent years, the PAC has repeatedly advised the Mayor, Council, and District agencies of the need to greatly accelerate infrastructure and enforcement changes to prioritize safe travel by pedestrians, including and perhaps especially those using assistive devices.

The PAC continues to believe that an accelerated equity-oriented investment in infrastructure improvements is essential to increasing pedestrian safety. We welcome DDOT's recent work to bring overdue safety improvements to long-underserved parts of DC, but they continue to be largely overshadowed by historic and ongoing underinvestment in these parts of the city, which not only see the largest numbers of traffic fatalities and serious injuries overall but suffer disproportionate shares of death and injury experienced by pedestrians. So far this year, 10 of 15 people killed while walking in DC have died in wards 5, 7, or 8.

For several years, the PAC has also recommended increasing use of Automated Traffic Enforcement (ATE) to monitor drivers' speeding, red-light running and failure to fully stop at stop signs. The effectiveness of such cameras has been noted by the ATE Task Force, which has reported that cameras decrease injury crashes by 30% in the first 12 months and that in 2019, 70% of vehicles that received any citations received only one.

By the end of September, there had been 38 traffic fatalities in the District, a 52% increase over this time last year. 15 of these fatalities – 39.5% – were pedestrians. At the beginning of October, we appear likely to end the year with, for the third time in four years, the highest traffic fatality count since 2007 – and while per-mode records seem to only go back to 2011, unless something changes quickly, we will, for the third year in a row, end with the highest pedestrian fatality count on record.

In this context of rising traffic deaths – that is, a context of some drivers' continued blatant disregard for pedestrian safety and human life – **the PAC welcomes and strongly endorses** these bills. The dramatic rise in traffic fatalities, and pedestrian deaths in particular, shows that further measures are needed if dangerous driving is to be taken seriously by all drivers, regardless of who issued their permits. As the PAC has noted time and again, that "there are consequences for reckless and dangerous driving" is not the message drivers receive on DC streets. These bills outline a variety of measures to more clearly signal to drivers that their unacceptable behavior cannot continue.

However, before I discuss the individual bills, I want to call out a language issue in several: the use of the word “accident” to refer to vehicular collisions. I don’t have time here to go into just how this word minimizes the significant damage and lasting pain even non-fatal crashes can cause, but I ask that Council [drop the A word](#) and amend all of these bills as needed to refer to “crashes”, “collisions”, or other words that don’t diminish life-changing trauma.

We understand the Committees will be looking to merge these four into a single, stronger bill, so we want to highlight several features which we particularly look forward to seeing in the final bill:

- The *Strengthening Traffic Enforcement, Education, and Responsibility (“STEER”) Act (B25-0425)* would penalize anyone who receives more than a certain number of tickets in a given period, *even if they pay them*, because you should not be able to buy a pass to drive dangerously.
- The *STEER Act* and the *License Suspension Reform bill (B25-0421)* would suspend the license and registration of drivers *charged with*, not just convicted of, certain violent driving behaviors such as DUI or negligent homicide. We should also consider impounding the vehicles, or some other way of preventing their operation while the registration is suspended.
- The *STEER Act* would also, as the Mayor and Governors continue to refuse any notion of reciprocity for ATE fines, allow the Attorney General’s office to sue drivers who refuse to pay their fines.
- The *ATE Effectiveness bill (B25-0422)* would, among many other things, require the DMV to notify insurance companies of drivers with large numbers of moving violations, and, as I and many others have long requested, require agencies such as the police that can “identify vehicles eligible for [booting or] towing” to establish communications with “and provide for automated alerts to” agencies such as DPW that have booting & towing equipment.
- The *Fraudulent Vehicle Tag Enforcement bill (B25-0435)* would require DPW to boot and/or tow vehicles with fake or fraudulent tags – *temp or “permanent”* – or large numbers of outstanding tickets; make some other things immediately tow-eligible, including long-expired and just-plain-missing tags; classify making and selling fake tags as a form of forgery; and ban dark and distorted plate covers and other intentionally-obscured tags.

We welcome these changes, and also look forward to the robust, vigorous oversight that Council will undoubtedly need to ensure the Administration implements them, and we call on Council to monitor closely the allocation and actual use of funds to significantly improve accountability for dangerous driving. We also reiterate the need to continue accelerating financial and staff-time investment in pedestrian infrastructure. While enforcement is important to get persistently dangerous drivers off the road, enforcement alone will not make streets safe. We must also actually build safer streets.