

Testimony of Families for Safe Streets
The New York City Council Committee on Transportation
April 9, 2014

Good morning. Thank you Chair Rodriguez and members of the Committee for holding this hearing today and for your ongoing support of Vision Zero. My name is Amy Cohen and I am here representing Families for Safe Streets.

Yesterday was six months since my son Sammy was killed by a van across the street from our home in Brooklyn. It has been an agonizing time for our family and more painful than anyone should have to endure.

Families for Safe Streets is comprised of other families, like us, whose loved ones have been killed or maimed by reckless behavior and dangerous conditions on New York City's streets. We are parents, children, partners, and siblings and represent the full breadth of New York's diversity. As survivors, we bear witness to our pain and suffering in order to press for the elimination of fatalities and injuries from traffic collisions. We envision a city where pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles safely co-exist and children and adults can travel freely without risk of harm -- where no loss of life in traffic is acceptable.

I have come here today to remind you of the urgency of your work and to plead with you to do everything in your power to ensure that New York City has sufficient speed cameras to supplement police enforcement of the speed limit.

Currently, the most expansive speed camera bill in the New York State legislature offers NYC 140 speed cameras in addition to the current 20, with the purported goal of protecting school zones. However, there are more than 2,500 schools in NYC. In addition, the proposed bill would only allow the cameras to operate during school hours (7 am – 4 pm weekdays). So the 160 cameras could protect only 6% of NYC school children and only when they are coming and going to school, not any other time they are outside.

The vast majority of fatal traffic crashes occur after 4pm and on the weekends when the cameras would be off. Sammy was killed at 5pm a block from a pre-school and elementary school. If there had a camera to slow the car that killed Sammy, it would not have been operational.

Nearly three hundred people are killed and thousands more suffer life-debilitating injuries from traffic collisions each year. Speeding is the number one cause of these collisions. During our recent trip to Albany, Assemblyman Joseph Lentol eloquently acknowledged that most New Yorkers, including him, speed. If the City is to overcome its speeding epidemic, it will need every proven tool including automated enforcement.

The current NYS bill would be a positive step and it is imperative that the Council does everything possible to ensure this bill is passed. However, it is only a first step.

On May 6th, Families for Safe Streets is going to Albany to press for more. Please remember Sammy, join us on May 6th, and do everything in your power to make our streets safer. Thank you.

Every 33 hours, someone is killed in traffic in NYC.

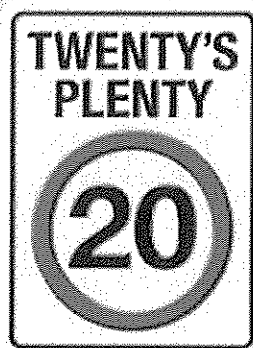
Every 10 seconds, a New Yorker suffers a traffic-related injury.

More New Yorkers are killed in traffic crashes than are murdered with guns.

Five NYC children are hit by cars daily.

As families whose loved ones have been killed or maimed by reckless behavior and dangerous conditions on New York City's streets, we demand an end to traffic violence. We are parents, children, partners, and siblings of victims and represent the full breadth of New York's diversity. As survivors, we bear witness to our pain and suffering in order to press for the elimination of fatalities and injuries. We envision a city where pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles safely co-exist and children and adults can travel freely without risk of harm – where no loss of life in traffic is acceptable.

In early 2014, we came together to turn our grief into action so no one else has to endure the pain we have suffered. We formally announced our creation as a force for change so **Vision Zero** (reducing serious injuries and fatalities on our streets to zero through engineering, enforcement and education) is rapidly implemented in NYC. We receive support and guidance from **Transportation Alternatives**, though family members make all decisions regarding our initiatives.



Take Action Today

Twenty's Plenty: Tell Mayor de Blasio and your representative in the City Council to implement a speed limit of 20 mph on residential streets.

Lower speed limits allow drivers more time to react to avoid crashes and when crashes do occur, injuries are substantially reduced. When hit at 20 miles per hour, a pedestrian has a 95% chance of surviving; at 40 miles per hour the survival rate is less than 30%.



Stop Speeding. Save Lives.

Demand Speed Cameras:

One of the best ways to make safe streets is with better laws and with consistent and predictable enforcement of those laws.

Speed cameras are the best place to start. Share this message with the Mayor, the City Council, and the New York State Legislature.

Press: We feel strongly that the city and the country need to hear our stories. To interview a member of the group please contact:

Transportation Alternatives (transalt.org) at **212-629-8080**.

Join Us

As families who have experienced the tragic loss of a loved one to reckless traffic in NYC, we stand with others with similar experiences. We welcome new members so please let us know if you would like to join us.

Contact:

Familiesforsafestreets.org

familiesforsafestreets@gmail.com

@NYC_SafeStreets

Monthly Meetings:

2nd Saturday of every month at 12 noon

For location information, contact

Transportation Alternatives, 212-629-8080

If you have not suffered a loss but are interested in supporting traffic safety, please contact **Transportation Alternatives** at **212-629-8080**.

Every minute change is delayed, someone you love is at risk.

Five Lives Lost

Seth, 22

On 11/4/09, Seth Kahn was struck, knocked down, run over and killed by a city bus on Ninth Avenue at 53rd Street in New York City. He was one of the most careful people you ever want to meet. Seth was kind, generous, and everyone loved him and now our only child is gone forever and our life is in shambles. The bus driver had just come off a one-week suspension for texting while driving; he was off route and failed to yield to a pedestrian in the crosswalk, making the left turn at an excessive speed. Seth brought color, humor and positive energy into the world wherever he went. He was studying toy design at FIT and working for a company creating holiday windows for major department stores in NYC. We think of Seth every single day.

Ella, 23

On 1/31/13, Ella was struck by a city bus outside the Myrtle-Wyckoff subway station in Bushwick, Brooklyn. She was not texting or talking on the phone. She was a dancer, surefooted and self-aware. A bus driver was looking in her rearview mirror trying to avoid a taxi at this complicated, pedestrian-unfriendly intersection, and ended our beautiful daughter's life in an instant. Ella had great promise, a zest for life and was the light of our lives. She was an artist and a humanitarian and was applying to PhD programs while working in a psychology lab at Columbia. She was loved and adored by her friends and family and has left a devastated mother, father and brother. We suffer everyday without her.

Ally, 3

On 10/6/13, a driver was turning left through a crosswalk and hit and killed our daughter, Ally. Ally was behaving exactly the way you would want your own 3-year-old to while crossing the street – in the crosswalk, with the green light, hand-in-hand with grandma. This driver, instead of yielding to a toddler and her grandmother – who by law, as pedestrians, had the right of way – made a conscious decision to muscle his way through the crosswalk in his SUV. With this very action he killed our daughter and changed our lives forever. Our daughter is gone. We are never going to see her blow out another candle. We are never going to see her start kindergarten. We are never going to see her jump in puddles again.

Sammy, 12

On 10/8/13, our son Sammy was run over and killed in front of our home. If the speed limit had been 20 mph, the driver likely would have been able to stop and Sammy would likely still be alive today. Sammy's death has rocked the very foundation of who we are and forever changed our lives. Our son was a warm, loving, energetic, and bright child. He loved sports and played on a travel soccer team where he was the anchor of the defense, sometimes officially the team captain, but always something of a leader. Only a few weeks before he was killed, he rode a 100-mile century bike ride with his Dad around New York City. He was comfortable in his own skin and put on no airs. He hugged us every day, regularly said he loved us, held hands frequently while walking with his Mom, and adored his 15-year-old sister. It is a struggle just to keep going without him. We cry every day for Sammy – we miss him so much.

Cooper, 9

On 1/10/14, Cooper was coming home from dinner with his dad, Dr. Richard Stock, when a taxi driver turned left from 97th Street onto West End Avenue, killing Cooper and injuring his father as they crossed the avenue. The driver's license was not taken away and the Taxi and Limousine Commission has not investigated what happened, meaning he is still allowed to drive a taxi. In life, Cooper's energy was boundless. He loved basketball, goofing around with his family, and classic rock – "Little Wing" by Jimi Hendrix was a favorite. He also was a budding poet and wrote a poem called "Believe":

Hold fast to dreams | You have to believe | To succeed | So always believe | And hold fast to dreams



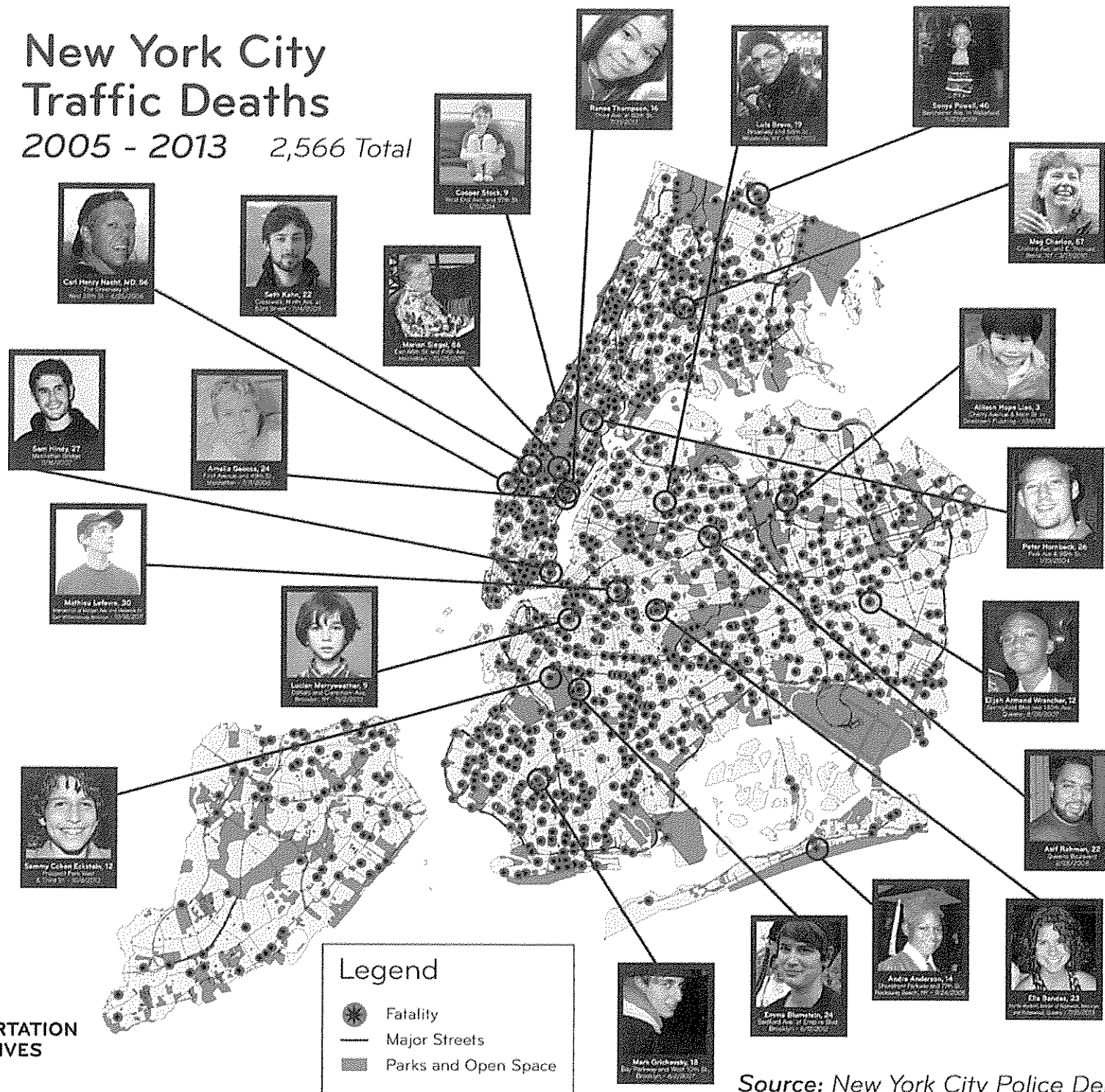
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in traffic in NYC.





New York City Traffic Deaths

2005 - 2013 2,566 Total



TRANSPORTATION
ALTERNATIVES

Source: New York City Police Department