

March 21, 2022

Chairman Langerholc, Chairman Flynn, members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

Thank you for considering HB 140, a bill that will save countless lives and prevent traffic accidents in Pennsylvania through the implementation of parking protected bike lanes.

My sister Susan Hicks died Oct. 23, 2015 on Forbes Avenue in Pittsburgh, when she was hit by a car while riding her bicycle. She was 34 years old. HB 140, "Susan and Emily's Law", is named after my sister and Emily Fredricks (of Philadelphia), who also died in a tragic cycling accident in Pennsylvania. The bill amends the vehicle code to allow for protected bike lanes and pedestrian plazas. The impetus for the legislation is a grass-roots movement initiated by the friends and families of Susan and Emily, who are advocating for changes in the vehicle code to create a safer road space for all cyclists. Along with the many friends, colleagues, and family of Susan and Emily, I believe these changes to the vehicle code will make the road a safer space for bicycles while also preserving space for vehicle transit.

Susan died commuting home from work. It was daylight, and there was relatively heavy traffic, including foot traffic. I know because I met the pedestrian who saw it happen and first found Susan. His life—like many others—was upended by this event. If you visit Pittsburgh, I encourage you to see the "ghost bike" Susan's friends have left on the sidewalk near the accident, and think about what it means for a community to witness a grisly death in the middle of a normal day. Like Susan I am a Pitt alum, and visits back are now forever bittersweet.

As a cultural anthropologist, Susan was keenly aware of the need for empathy and understanding. Part of the reason we did not pursue civil remedy from the man who caused the accident is that we knew she would not approve. One special reason my family supports HB 140, then, is that it is not punitive—in seeking to prevent accidents, it does not protect bicyclists at the expense of drivers, but equally protects drivers.

I do not know the man whose actions resulted in my sister's death, but I am sure that day, easily the worst in my life so far, ranks among the worst in his life too. Decisions made by committees like yours can prevent or minimize the opportunity for such awful days, throughout the communities you represent. We call on you to enact this legislation not only for the sake of victims, like Susan and Emily, but to protect the drivers who have no intention of causing such pain.

Too many families know the grief my family experienced when Susan was killed. Others know a related grief, experienced by everyone involved in these collisions—passersby like the man I mentioned earlier, other people injured, and the drivers of the cars and their families, whose lives are forever changed by these preventable accidents. This is an ongoing grief, which will never entirely heal. HB 140, if signed into law, could spare many, many people this enduring pain.

Michael R Hicks

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