



Walk Toronto Comments on Bill 107, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters

To: Members of the Standing Committee on General Government

From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee), prepared and submitted by Daniella Levy-Pinto

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On behalf of Walk Toronto, I would like to address the proposed Bill 107 – *Get Ontario Moving Act*, and request that it include provisions to protect vulnerable road users.

Walk Toronto is a grassroots pedestrian advocacy group that works with various levels of government, community groups and citizens to improve walking conditions and safety. We have members in all areas of the city, from downtown to the suburbs. Walk Toronto is a member of a province-wide Vulnerable Road User Coalition, in support of broader measures to protect all the people outside of a motor vehicle: pedestrians, roadway workers, emergency responders, bicyclists and motorcyclists.

Bill 107 touches on the definition of a Vulnerable Road User, and I am here today to request that this legislation be expanded; this is a great opportunity for Ontario to enact a Vulnerable Road User Law within Bill 107, to ensure that the new legislation will benefit all the people in our province.

Walking provides significant benefits to people, including better health, reduced costs for transportation, diminished traffic congestion, and improved air quality. In many Ontario communities, walking is gaining in popularity and as a basic means of transportation; furthermore, as the population ages, an increasing number of seniors will be giving up driving and turning to other means of transportation.

Everyone is a pedestrian at some point during the day. Pedestrian safety is a social equity issue, as non-motor vehicle users bear a disproportionate share of road injury and risk. While the rates of injury and death due to road traffic collisions for motor vehicle occupants have declined in Ontario over the past years, this is not the case for pedestrians, motorcyclists and bicyclists. This is due to the laws that exist to protect



people inside of cars (Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators, 2013)¹; pedestrians are more likely to be killed or injured in a collision than motorists, as they lack the hard, protective exterior of a vehicle, or safety features such as seatbelts or airbags.

An average of 7 Vulnerable Road Users are taken to the emergency department every day in Ontario, many with life-altering injuries. In 2016, 96 pedestrians were killed and 4189 were injured by a driver on Ontario's roads (Ontario Annual Road Safety Report). In 2018, 41 pedestrians died in Toronto's streets.

Seniors are at increased risk of being struck by vehicles when crossing the street because of mobility issues, declines in vision, hearing and perceptual skills that are common with aging; they may also walk more slowly than pedestrians of other age groups. Children are also at greater risk due to less developed cognitive, visual, and auditory senses and their smaller size.

People with disabilities are also at a greater risk. I am totally blind and get around with my guide dog. I increasingly experience aggressive driving that puts me at risk. Impatient drivers at crosswalks – although in Ontario drivers are required to make full stops at crosswalks to yield the full roadway until the pedestrians have crossed the road, this is not always the case: I hear them accelerate immediately after I cross in front of them. In more occasions than I would like to remember, I've encountered drivers who did not make a full stop before proceeding through a right turn on red, something that is illegal. Thankfully, my guide dog pulled me back before a car sped up in front of us.

We are aware of the risks and the statistics. We are concerned because we know that many drivers who kill or seriously injure a vulnerable road user (VRU) are never charged, and that fines and bans are often weak. VRUs need a law that ensures accountability from those who inflict greater damage.

There is a limit to what VRUs can do to protect themselves against the errors of inattentive or aggressive drivers. Drivers have an additional responsibility to drive cautiously in pedestrian areas due to the much greater vulnerability of pedestrians.

All road deaths are preventable. Legislation is an essential component in deterring dangerous driving behaviour, correcting bad driving habits, and providing justice to those who are harmed by road violence.

Legislation to protect VRUs is something that we believe all parties in Ontario can support. VRU deaths are a growing epidemic on our streets and something must be done

¹ Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA). (2013). Countermeasures to Improve Pedestrian Safety In Canada. Ottawa: CCMTA. Available from: <http://ccmta.ca/en/publications/road-safety-research>.



to stop it. We can no longer accept pedestrian injuries as something that is inevitable when motor vehicles share the road system with vulnerable road users.

As part of Bill 107, please amend the Highway Traffic Act to ensure that all road users are protected. There should be legal consequences for those who seriously injure or kill a VRU, including: driving license suspension; community service related to road safety; driver re-education courses; and mandatory court appearances to hear Victim Impact Statements. You can make Ontario the first Province in Canada to enact a VRU law and set the standard for the rest of our Country.

Fewer deaths and less severe injuries to VRUs that require hospitalizations would also be good for the tax-payer; safer road conditions would mean that more people could and would utilize healthier modes of transportation, including walking or cycling, addressing sedentary life style issues. This, in turn, would have positive health implications at an individual level, and result in significant savings for the public health system.