



Testimony of Amy Cohen, FSS Co-Founder NYS Joint Budget Hearing February 15, 2023

My name is Amy Cohen and I am the co-founder of Families for Safe Streets. Nine years ago, after my 12-year-old son was killed by a reckless driver in front of our home, I never thought I would be testifying in front of government legislatures, speaking with the media, or helping lead this movement of grief-stricken family members to demand change. Yet somehow I continue to do so because I cannot bear to watch so many people lose family members and join this horrible club.

Even nine years later, the grief of losing your child in such a senseless, preventable way is indescribable. I loved being Sammy's mom. It was the best job I ever had. He was incredibly bright, compassionate and loving. New York City's failure to keep our children safe robbed him of a chance to grow up. But it also robbed me of a chance to watch him blossom into the incredible young man he would be today. I miss him every day.

We desperately need bold action. We need rapid implementation of the proven traffic calming and design changes needed to ensure that every street, across the city, is safe to navigate for our children, our seniors and all New Yorkers.

We need to enact policies that we know are proven to work. **I am asking the State legislature to support the passage of Sammy's Law in the NYS final budget this session.** Named after my son, Sammy's law would allow NYC to control its own speed limits and lower limits in places where DOT finds it necessary.

New Yorkers agree the time has come. Seventy-two percent of New York City voters believe the City should have the authority to set its own speed limits. Sixty eight percent of New York City voters said they would support seeing the speed limit lowered from 25 to 20 miles per hour on residential streets near their homes.

Speeding is a major factor in four of every five fatal crashes. Thirty percent of pedestrians struck by motor vehicles at an impact speed of 25 mph will sustain serious injury and about 12 percent will die. Small differences in speed can mean life or death: each one mile per hour increase in a vehicle's speed results in nearly a three percent

increase in the mortality rate. Safer speeds work: Lower speed limits in New York City, authorized by the State Legislature in 2014, contributed to a 36% decline in pedestrians killed in the City and the lowest traffic fatalities, in 2018, in history since record-keeping began in 1910.

Sammy's Law will give New York City the power to lower speed limits in a way that is tailored to neighborhoods' actual safety needs. It also is critical that NYC be able set a designated lower speed limit for its Open Streets program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for allowing us to remind everyone here today why this work is so important. This is not about just numbers or abstract ideas. Lives are at stake and people are counting on you to protect their loved ones.