

Friends and Families for Safe Streets (FFSS) comment regarding Bill 212

Friends and Families for Safe Streets is a group whose loved ones were struck and killed by a motorist, and people who survived being struck with severe life-altering injuries. We are unwilling experts on the human toll exacted by dangerous road design, and car-centric laws and public policy.

We are appalled to see our government attack safe streets. The complete streets that Doug Ford wants to rip out would have saved our loved ones' lives, by preventing the collisions that killed them entirely, or by reducing driver's speed to something survivable.

By prohibiting municipalities from building safe streets, the sole outcome of passing Bill 212 is that more people will be violently killed in crashes that would have otherwise been prevented. It is unconscionable and unforgiveable that this government is openly trying to get more Ontarians killed.

Last year in Ontario, 616 beloved Ontarians were senselessly killed in crashes. Their families and wider communities were devastated. 36,090 Ontarians were injured, ranging from minor to life-threatening injuries. In a province with such a shockingly poor road safety record, it is perverse to destroy safe streets, and prohibit municipalities from making road safety improvements, effectively prohibiting them from saving their own constituents' lives.

Doubtless, countless experts in many fields will weigh in with research and studies to demonstrate that Bill 212 is a wasteful travesty. What we can offer is our unwilling expertise in abject suffering in the aftermath of senseless road violence, of losing a loved one or nearly losing a life in a preventable crash. This Bill will directly cause: more funerals, more anguish and grief, more tear-filled days and nights, more irreparably shattered families and communities, more empty chairs around tables, more joyless holidays, more silent bedrooms in homes, more children without their parents, more parents without their children, more bloodstained clothing and wallets and wedding rings handed back in paper bags, more isolation, more devastation, more lives destroyed, more brain injuries, more spinal cord injuries, more jobs lost, more people living in poverty and unhoused, more lifelong chronic pain, more strain on our overburdened health care system, more trauma to bystanders, more fear, more white-hot rage at the callous injustice, more cruelty unleashed on people who did nothing to deserve it.

The reasoning publicly stated for Bill 212 is perverse, insulting, and a callous slap in the face to the thousands of people in Ontario grieving their loved ones. Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sarkaria has said he wants to give people more time with their families. What about the thousands of families across Ontario who can't spend time with their loved one, because their loved one was killed in a preventable crash? How can anyone spend time with their family

when they are struck and killed by a motorist? What about all the families of those who will inevitably be killed where this government rips out or prohibits safe streets? If Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sarkaria wanted to guarantee families more time together, he would act to build safe streets across the province instead of ripping out the safest streets. You can't spend time with your family if you are killed in a crash.

Let us share what it is like in the aftermath of road violence. First, the police unexpectedly call you or show up at your door and deliver the news that shatters your world and your heart into millions of pieces. You are brought to the hospital where your loved one is, whether they are your spouse, child, parent, brother or sister. You have to see them lying there, dead, to identify them. Your heart breaks with the care the health care staff took to clean the blood up for you, even as you see the spots they missed. Or your loved one haven't died yet, and you are helplessly trapped at their bedside in horror and desperation, begging any possible higher power for them not to die, until they eventually succumb to their injuries.

You receive your loved one's belongings handed back to you in a paper bag. Wallet, keys, maybe a wedding ring. You receive back your loved one's torn, bloodied clothing. You are paralyzed for years, struggling to decide what to do with it.

You are thrust into planning a funeral. You probably didn't have a chance to ask what your loved one's preferences would be, because they were killed so suddenly and so long before their natural death would have occurred. Burial or cremation? Funeral home or church? What are you supposed to do? What if you do the wrong thing?

You are left with an empty chair at your family's table. Your family holidays are subdued and bleached of joy. There is an empty bedroom that simultaneously is silent while also screaming at you. What do you do when your loved one's scent fades from their clothes and sheets, and the meagre comfort you drew from that withers away? What do you do with the furniture? The trinkets and memories? What do you do with the photographs on their walls?

You might receive support from your community in the early days. But it falls away gradually, until you feel forgotten. People move on and think you should have gotten over it too, but there is still a gaping hole in your heart that you carry around every second of every day.

You are subjected to legal processes that are shockingly hostile and insulting. If the driver who struck you or killed your loved one is charged at all, it is likely a trivial highway traffic act infraction. The value of human life is reduced to a small fine, a few hundred dollars maybe, and a few demerit points if you are lucky. You are utterly denied any sense of justice, while the driver who devastated you is allowed to keep driving and put more people at risk. Having recently voted down Bill 40, *Moving Ontarians Safely Act, 2023*, Conservative MPPs will be very

familiar with the lack of consequences for at-fault reckless drivers who kill and severely injure others.

THAT'S what happens in road violence. It is not just numbers. It is not abstract. It is gut-wrenchingly real and it destroys lives. This is the fate that will be inflicted on more Ontarians if you move forward with Bill 212. It is infinitely worse than being stuck sitting comfortably in your car for a few extra minutes.

Will this government start paying for funerals and lawsuit settlements for all the people guaranteed to be killed on the streets they ripped up, and on the streets they denied lifesaving upgrades to? In the face of an ongoing affordability crisis, will this government start reimbursing Ontarians for their increased transportation costs, when they are forced back into their cars and have to spend thousands more every year on gas and car maintenance instead of using active transportation?

Speaking on behalf of crash survivors, and for countless Ontarians who have lost their voice because they were killed in a preventable crash, **our membership demands you change course.** You must not rip out safe streets and sentence more of our neighbors to the anguish we have experienced. You must not prohibit municipalities from saving lives and preventing injuries. Crashes kill pedestrians, cyclists, and car drivers alike, and human life is more important than speed. If what happened to us had happened to you, it would never occur to you to inflict this horrible fate on more people in this province, solely for a cheap political point in what is the ultimate non-partisan issue. **If you continue on this reckless, immoral path, you will own every preventable death and serious injury on Toronto's roads.**